
A
SHORT STORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



GEO.
SER

A
SHORT STORY:

INTERSPERSED WITH

POETRY.

BY A YOUNG LADY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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A

SHORT STORY.

CHAP XXIII

‘ Think of (reflexion’s stab!) the pitying friend,
With shoulder shrugg’d and sorry.’

ONE fine frosty morning, Laura having prevailed on her father to take a walk, went to meet him on his return home: he was at a short distance from the cottage, and she hastily ran up to meet him, for she perceived that he held a letter in his hand. Sir Robert smiled at the agitation of her countenance, as she approached, and exclaimed, ‘ Can

you guess, Laura, who has written you this letter?’

‘ You know that I have but one correspondent,’ answered Laura, blushing.

‘ Well, then, I am sure that correspondent is a young lady; if I may judge by the direction, which is so femininely and fashionably scrawled, that it requires some perseverance to decypher it:—but here, take your letter,’ continued Sir Robert, ‘ I do not envy you the task of perusing it.’

Laura broke a fine seal, decorated with the motto, ‘ je ne change qu’en mourant,’ and perceived that it came from her forgetful negligent relation, Miss Louisa Dornford. It was as follows:

‘ DEAR COUSIN,

‘ My mamma desires me to inform you that we were all vastly chagrined to hear of your papa’s misfortunes, and she thinks it quite right of him to leave the great house, and not to attempt any longer to set himself on a footing with people in a certain style of life. If your papa wants to go to America, or any *other* part of Europe, perhaps we may be able to raise a subscription to fit him out: for we have a great many friends among the nobility, who would be happy to oblige us in any thing.

‘ My mamma is likewise so good to say she will do all in her power to get you a place, as companion to a lady, or perhaps you may prefer to be a governess in some genteel family; for I re-

member you was always mighty fond of preaching to people, and setting yourself up as a pattern-piece. But forget and forgive, that's my maxim; and I am sure I shall be infinitely rejoiced if you will come to town, and spend two or three months with me.

‘My dear girl, do come and put yourself in Fortune’s way!—what signifies moping in the country—all the learning in the world won’t get you a husband. It really won’t be an expensive scheme. I suppose you won’t mind travelling in the stage coach; and as for cloaths, I dare say you have got some, that with a little alteration will look very tolerable: besides, you have such a pretty knack at millenery and all fancy works.—Apropos, I want to consult you about my next court

dress; but we will talk more about that when we meet. Don't forget to bring your drawings and your embroidery silks.

‘ You can't think how full the operas have been this winter. I hope you will be able to see Blue Beard—it's the sweetest, sublimest thing imaginable!

‘ I was obliged the other night to go with Lady Vernon to see Mrs. Siddons act the Grecian Daughter; but 'twas an immense bore; and I was obliged to cry because every body else did, and I made myself a perfect fright.

‘ Who, do you think, was of our party?—why, no less a personage than your old flam, Colonel Somerville!—You can't think what a particular atten-

tion he pays me: and he has given me the most beautiful pair of diamond earrings you ever saw. A'n't I very generous to ask you to come to town whilst he is here? but mind you don't try for him again. "They that will not when they may"—you remember the old proverb.

"I suppose you will want to hear something about fashions. Black wigs are all the rage: but as you mayn't be able to afford to buy one, I recommend you to have all your long hair cut off close to your head; for I do assure you it's now quite obsolete. You must shew all your shoulders and poll behind; your elbows must be bare, half way up your arm; and you must wear only one petticoat, and a scanty robe of cambric muslin.

• I think I am very good to write you such a long letter. Pray write soon, that I may know when you'll come. Don't forget to bring your tambour frame; you can't think what a pretty gold muslin I'm working. Adieu, and I remain, with duty to my uncle,

Much your's,

LOUISA CLARA MATILDA DORNFORD.'

As soon as Laura had finished this truly *miss* like and unfeeling epistle, her father requested to see it; but she handed it to him with regret, for she feared that he would be vexed and irritated. She was not mistaken, for long before he came to the conclusion he tore it in pieces, angrily exclaiming, 'What an impertinent girl!—how can she dare to suppose that you will ever condescend to become toad-eater to some old

hag of quality;—or that you will go to town to “put yourself in Fortune’s way:” in other words, to expose your person to sale; and become the legal property of the highest bidder, no matter whether knave or fool.’

Laura at this moment could not avoid casting a significant glance at her father. He knew that she was thinking of Colonel Somerville, and somewhat embarrassed, he hastily continued, ‘How ready people always are to insult the unfortunate, under the mask of friendship! Only imagine, Laura, that they should propose to make me the object of a paltry subscription. Ah! my child!—how are we lost!—how are we degraded!—alas! why was I so extravagant, so rash, so mad!—Laura, I am wretched, but you cannot

know *how* wretched, for you have never felt the keen inward pangs of self reproach.'

Laura took her father's hand, and pressing it gently within her own, continued some moments silent: then wishing to change the melancholy topic, she enquired 'if he likewise had not received a letter that morning?'

'Yes, my dear!' replied Sir Robert, 'and from one of those few friends who have not deserted me in my adversity. Montague is indeed sincere! he does me kind offices without offering me advice; and he pities me without telling me so. The letter he has now written to me contains a request from himself and his amiable wife to spend a few weeks with them at Halthorpe. It is

a very cheerful town; and I hope, my dear Laura, that you will have no objection to accept the invitation. The journey will be short, and the expences quite trifling:—besides, I own that I should be very glad to change the scene, now that the evenings are so woefully long, and that the curate is going to London.'

Laura did not wish for any scheme that would oblige her to go into society; but as her father seemed pleased with the anticipation of it, she did not raise the slightest objection. It was therefore agreed that they should commence their journey the following week; and that Susan should accompany them, leaving the care of the cottag to an old woman who lived in the village.

CHAP. XXIV

‘ I mingl’d with the young, the gay, the happy
Forcing a hollow smile at giddy joy,
While my poor heart sat mocking it within.’

SIR Robert and his daughter were received on their arrival at Halthorpe with the utmost kindness and hospitality. Mrs. Montague was delighted with her lovely young guest, and did every thing in her power to prevail on her to engage in those amusements which the town so plentifully afforded. Laura complied, more from the wish to oblige, than from the hope of being entertained; and indeed she soon discovered that she never

was so languid and dejected, as in those public assemblies which were thought to be the most brilliant in the county;— even though her beauty was the theme of general admiration, and the whisper of ‘who is she?’ ran through a crowded circle of elegant women and gay officers. She had never been particularly fond of dancing; and now that her heart was so ill at ease, she found it insufferably irksome to listen to the commonplace conversation or fulsome flattery of any *soi disant* beau, who might chuse to single her out as a partner. If she went to a play, every melancholy sentiment that was uttered seemed applicable to her own situation; and if at a concert any music was played that she had heretofore practised with Edward, she dreaded lest the tears that started into her eyes should excite observation.

Mrs. Montague, an amiable and sensible woman, was well aware, from the increased dejection of Laura, that it was not merely loss of fortune, but some latent and more severe affliction, that preyed on her heart. She endeavoured to win her confidence; and Laura, of a nature ingenuous, and prone to catch, with eager delight, every emanation of tenderness, did not seek to withhold it. Mrs. Montague listened with kind and soothing solicitude: by degrees she blended advice with condolence.

Laura heard her with silent respect: but she talked like a woman who knew the world, yet never having felt the strong emotions of genuine love, she was not interested by sympathy, and consequently could not discuss the subject with that tender eloquence

which persuades the heart. It was after a long conversation with her kind mother, that Laura, still unconvinced by her arguments, employed a leisure hour in composing the following verses:

Alas! my friend, how vainly dost thou tell me
 That Reason may tranquility restore,
 And with her soft persuasive voice impel me
 To check my sorrows and to sigh no more!
 Ah! rather I would ask that lenient power,
 Oblivious Time, some solace to impart,
 Did I not feel that each revolving hour
 Binds him more firmly to my aching heart:
 Or I would court the silken smiles of Pleasure
 Athwart my path a cheering beam to throw;
 But no! her once lov'd sounds, in sprightly measure,
 Seem all discordant to the ear of Woe.
 Nor mirth, nor distant space, nor change of season,
 My bosom's secret anguish can remove;
 All, all are vain,—but chief thy boasted Reason,
 For it was she, alas! that bade me love.
 His virtues, graces, genius, she repeated,
 And much I gloried in the heart I won;
 Nor did I blush, though easily intreated,
 I scarce had seen him ere I lost my own.
 For to my soul she brought the sweet conviction,
 That he was noble, generous, and refin'd;

Such as bright Fancy oft pourtrays in fiction,
 With every charm to fascinate the mind.
 Then reason whisper'd he could ne'er deceive me,
 Or with feign'd vows of tenderness beguile;
 And little reck'd I that it e'er would grieve me
 To catch his looks of love, his heavenly smile.
 Even now, when adverse fortune bids us sever,
 Amid my sighs and tears she brings relief:
 She tells me that his heart is mine for ever,
 And that his virtues sanctify my grief.
 Thus the heart-rending pangs of secret sadness
 Reason has nurtur'd, but can ne'er remove:
 No! she must die with grief, or rave in madness,
 Ere for a moment I can cease to love!—

After Laura had concluded these
 lines, she carefully put them into her
 porte folio, to secure them from inspec-
 tion; and finding that she had yet some
 time at her own disposal, she wrote
 the following letter to

EDWARD.

' You suffered almost a fortnight to
 pass away without writing to me; but

I pardon you, my friend, in consideration of the happiness I felt when I received your long wished-for packet. O! with what delight I snatched it from Susan, as she held it in her hand!—then running up stairs with breathless impatience, I locked myself into my own apartment, that no one might interrupt me, or check the emotions of my soul, while I was reading it.

• Edward, you know not the empire you have gained over all my faculties! I seem half entranced, and I continue to gaze on your letters even after I have read them over and over again, and though my eyes are so bedimmed with delicious tears that I cannot decypher a syllable. I feel almost as happy as if you were near me; and I mentally exclaim, with the heroine of a beautiful

German drama, "This contemptible breath of life—this dew-drop in the ocean of eternity, how voluptuously is it consumed in thinking of Edward." You cannot imagine how I sicken at the bustle and dissipation of this great town: but as my father appears cheerful and amused, I do not tell him how much I wish to return to our cottage. I there could enjoy my books, my music, and those tender reveries which are so far preferable to the gay assemblies which I am obliged to attend; where I listen to all the conversation that is addressed to me with a vacant stare, and pre-occupied imagination; or sit alone, and moralize on the mistaking many, who seek for happiness in the haunts of dissipation. Ah! surely, Edward, they have never cast their eyes with rapture on the wonders

of creation : they have never comforted the afflicted : they have never tasted the sweets of that intercourse where "thought meets thought;" or they would turn with disgust from the pursuit of frivolous and soul-consuming pleasures !

‘ I recollect, my friend, that your regiment was lately stationed in this neighbourhood, and that you have several acquaintance among the military who are now here ; therefore I endeavour to render myself pleasing to them, and to decorate my person with elegant simplicity. I flatter myself that you do not attach much value to exterior beauty ; but it is always delicious to hear the praises of those we love ! The most insignificant person, whose opinion is thus gratifying to our

feelings, assumes a sudden importance in our eyes: we applaud his discernment, and he almost claims an interest in our heart. It is for this reason that I frequently dance and talk with a plain little Officer, who once said in the midst of a large company, 'Captain Somerville is the most sensible, good-tempered, and noble hearted young man of my acquaintance.' I gave him a look of grateful approbation and an involuntary smile: but a lady who sat next me, mistaking the expression of my countenance, whispered, "I perceive, Miss Mapleton, that you are rather incredulous with respect to the superlative merits of Captain Somerville. *Entre nous*, I believe he is rather a *scoop*, (hollow-headed, I mean) and he did not come to our assemblies above once or twice:

but, poor fellow! it was said that he had been terribly wounded by the bright eyes of some inexorable fair one; and I am always so charitable as to pardon the stupidity and inattention of a despairing *lover*.'

'Guess, Edward, what must have been my emotions during this harangue!—but, indeed, at all times I tremble and blush so much when I hear your name mentioned, that I am surprised I have not often betrayed my secret. I never venture to ask any questions concerning you; for I feel as if every one would be able to penetrate into the recesses of my heart; but, if, by some vague enquiry or distant allusion, I can succeed in making you the subject of discourse, I listen with silent delight. Ah! how are my friends

deceived if they imagine that dissipation can wear you from my mind !—I never regret you more than in the midst of crowded assemblies, where my thoughts are entirely abstracted from the scene, or where I cast a sickly smile on those who are around me, as I contrast them with the chosen of my heart.

‘ I will write to you again when we return to the cottage; but at present I feel such a languor on my spirits that I fear to infect you with my melancholy, and to fatigue you with uninteresting details. Ah no!—I recall these words; I do not fear, my Edward, that any details can be uninteresting that prove to you the truth and tenderness of your

‘ LAURA.’

CHAP. XXV.

‘ Think’st thou I’ll make a life of jealousy
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh surmises ?’

AFTER an absence of six weeks Sir Robert made a proposal for returning home; a proposal that was gladly seconded by Laura, and it was agreed that they should set off on their journey the ensuing week. Their hospitable friends endeavoured to prevail on them to prolong their visit: and Mrs. Montague who felt a great affection for Laura, was very desirous that she should remain with her during the whole Summer. One day after she

had been urging this request with great earnestness she concluded her arguments by saying, ‘ Indeed, my dear girl, I am fully persuaded that it will be of infinite service, both to your health and spirits, to prolong your visit:—we are as gay here in the Summer as in the Winter, and I am perfectly convinced that there is no remedy for hopeless love, so efficacious, as a quantum sufficit of dissipation. That it has not succeeded in your case, I am willing to allow; because you have not given it a proper trial: but if you will continue to take my prescription four or five months longer, depend on it you will acknowledge that I am a very skillful physician; and know how to minister unto a mind diseased. Apropos, I heard last night from a gentleman who has lately left the town where Captain So-

merville resides, that he is in excellent spirits, a constant attendant at all the balls, and engaged in a flirtation with a very pretty girl.'

At these words Laura started; then shook her head in token of incredulity, and Mrs. Montague continued:

'Nay, I only repeat what I have heard; and when you have lived in the world as long as I have done, you will be equally aware of the mutability of the human heart. Do you not remember the observation of a celebrated French author,* 'On n'a pas dans le cœur de quoi toujours pleurer et toujours aimer.'

'I can never doubt the stability of Edward's affection,' interrupted Laura,

* Rochefoucault.

‘and suffer me to bring to your recollection another maxim from the same author, which is more consonant to my own opinion; ‘l’absence diminue les médiocres passions, et augmente les grandes, comme le vent éteint les bougies et allusne le feu.’

‘My dear girl,’ replied Mrs. Montague, ‘it now remains to be proved by the test of absence, whether your love resembles a wavering flame, or a consuming fire:—would it not be wiser to extinguish it altogether?’

‘What!’ cried Laura, mournfully, ‘to wander for ever in gloom and darkness without one ray to cheer my path through life?’ ‘Better so than to follow a treacherous light, an *ignis fatuus* that may lead you to

destruction,' answered Mrs. Montague:—'but, my love, I meant not to afflict you,' continued she, seeing that Laura could scarcely restrain her tears; 'I only intended to reason with you as a friend, to convince you what a weakness it is to indulge a romantic affection for Capt. Somerville, when it is impossible you can ever be united; and when it is even probable that ere this time he is perfectly tranquil; while, on his account, you are fruitlessly pining away, both health and happiness. Indeed (added she, in a hesitating voice) I had likewise some intention of pleading the cause of an amiable young man,—rich, sensible, elegant,—all that can be wished,—who is so much in love with you, that he is only restrained by the reserve of your manner from offering you his heart, his hand, and great estate.'

‘ I rejoice,’ replied Laura, ‘ that he has never made known to me his flattering intention; for there is nothing so distressing as to witness the embarrassment and chagrin of an amiable man, who with deep blushes and faltering accents has made known the secret of his heart, yet vainly strives to trace some correspondent emotion of tenderness in the countenance of her from whom he asks, but dreads to hear the decision of his fate.’ . At such a moment custom exacts the most rigid reserve and freezing forms of speech; but the heart dictates a very different mode of conduct: for how is it possible to look without an expression of kindness and gratitude on him who gives us the most unequivocal proof of admiration and esteem, and pays us the high compliment to imagine that our merits will insure

his happiness!—Ah! why are we constrained to treat him with cold indifference, and with less attention than is due to a stranger? Why are we not allowed to preserve the friend, though we cannot accept the lover?”

‘Because,’ replied Mrs. Montague, ‘the undistinguishing crowd would say that you gave undue encouragement, and would stigmatize you with the appellation of “coquette.” Besides, my dear, you do not seem to recollect the probability that a passion may be *feigned*, and not *felt*.’

‘O yes!’ replied Laura, ‘I have heretofore encountered sighing swains, most desperately smitten with the charms of my “marriageable graces;” but it is very easy to distinguish between the re-

dundant rhetorical language of interested addresses and the silent eloquence of sincere affection :

‘ Spisso in un dir confuso
E’n parole interrotte,
Meglio si esprime il core,
E piu par che si mora,
Che non si fa con voci adorne, e dotte
E’l silenzio amor suole
Aver prieghi, e parole.’

The conversation was now interrupted by the entrance of some visitors; and Laura feeling herself unequal to the task of entertaining them, was glad to seize the earliest opportunity of retiring into her own room. The next day, after taking an affectionate farewell of her obliging friends, she with pleasure followed her father into the post-chaise that was to convey them to the cottage.

CHAP. XXVI.

*'Va col pensier cercando in mille modi
Non creder quel, che al suo dispetto crede.'*

THE travellers proceeded several miles in silence. Sir Robert was gloomy at the thought of returning to a dismal cottage instead of his native mansion; and Laura was more uneasy than she was willing to avow, even to her own heart, at Mrs. Montague's insinuations respecting Edward.

'Ah no!' thought she, 'I will not doubt the sincerity of his affection, nor become a prey to ceaseless inquietude.'

Do I not wish him to be happy? and if he finds in other women the qualities he loves in me, why should he not derive pleasure from their society? Alas! I shall never experience a similar consolation!—I shall never discover any one who resembles Edward! Is it really possible that he can already cease to regret me? Ah no! it cannot be!—I will discard these tormenting, these unjust suspicions!’

Such were Laura’s wise determinations; but it was not so easy as she imagined to repress the insidious whispers of jealousy, and she remained absorbed in melancholy reflections till the postilion stopped at an inn where they were to change horses, and Laura prevailed on her father to alight, and remain there a few hours before they proceeded

homeward." He readily complied with her request, for he felt rather fatigued, and wished to take some refreshment.

Laura's heart palpitated with unwonted pleasure, for Edward's regiment had been quartered at a village near the post town during the period of their first acquaintance; and she felt a romantic desire to visit a spot where he had passed so many hours; and which would bring his image so forcibly to her mind. For this purpose she left her father at the inn, and walked till she reached a dreary village that jutted out into the sea in form of a peninsula. It contained a few dismal habitations and an old castle, totally devoid of every picturesque beauty, but of some note in history, for its walls had once immured an unfortunate royal captive; and

now re echoed the senseless merriment or bitter lamentations of those who, by the laws of war, had forfeited their freedom. Laura walked slowly on, and often stopped; as if she sought to discover traces of her lover in every object that surrounded her: she wished to have remained much longer on a spot that recalled such tender recollections, but fearing that her absence might occasion unpleasant enquiries, she hastily returned to the inn.

When the travellers were again seated in the post chaise Sir Robert soon fell asleep, and Laura was glad to meditate undisturbed, and to transcribe with her pencil the following lines, which she had composed, with incredible haste, during her late ramble.

How gloomy this castle, that frowns o'er the sea,

What a dreary and desolate scene !—

But ah ! 'tis a scene that is charming to me,

For here my BELOVED has been !

And methinks on these shores I could linger all day,

Regardless of winter's bleak wind :

For amid the dark prospect and wearisome way

His image would start to my mind.

Perhaps he has trod in the path I now tread,

Dejectedly musing alone :

And haply for me a fond tear he has shed,

' When he thought on the days that are gone.'

O days of illusion ! why flew ye so fast ?

Ye were like to sweet dreams that beguile ;

For Love threw a veil o'er the future and past,

And Reflection was silent the while.

O days of illusion ! still dear to my soul,

Your remembrance I faithfully keep ;

What tho' at the light of conviction I start,

Tho' I wake from my vision and weep !

And did my BELOVED e'er sorrow for me,

Did he sigh to behold me again,

When he wander'd alone on the banks of the sea,

Or ascended yon mountainous plain ?

Ah yes ! 'mid these scenes I was dear to his heart,

Nor could absence my image remove ;

Nor could chilling Indifference her torpor impart,

While Solitude smil'd upon Love.

But, alas ! to fine cities he hasten'd away,

And Indifference awaited him there,

For soon he could seek the abodes of the gay,
And could gaze with delight on the Fair.

Ah beautiful ladies, I envy your lot!

Ye are near him! ye hear his sweet voice!
He dwells on your graces, while I am forgot,
And, while I am sad, ye rejoice!

But wherefore did Jealousy whisper that thought?

For he values not beauty alone, [fraught,
Nor forgets the fond heart with pure tenderness
That Sympathy binds to his own.

And soon to the hills of the South I shall go,
And I'll search if I cannot descry
Where he dwells, 'mid those fanes, in the vallies below,
That glitter so bright in the sky.

For 'twill sooth my sad bosom to think he is near,
Tho' I never should see him again;

And there, while I wander, I'll check ev'ry tear,
Nor even to Echo complain. [mine;

Yet to *think* on the blessings that *might* have been

- - - Ah! even now the tear starts to my eye:

It falls, a fond tribute, on Sympathy's shrine,
With Hope's trembling—last—lingering sigh.

And no more will I weakly repine at my state,
Nor cast from me the goods that are given;
But seek for Contentment, whatever my fate,
And bow to the mandate of Heaven!

CHAP XXVII.

Heureuse celle qui connoissant ses avantages sait profiter de l'ivresse de l'amour pour [former aux vertus le cœur de son amant! Elle se lie à lui par une chaîne immortelle et sacrée; elle peut jeter sans crainte les yeux sur l'avenir, si l'amant a disparu elle y verra du moins un ami fidele et reconnoissant.]

SIR Robert and his daughter arrived at the cottage late in the evening, and the latter had the pleasure to find a letter from Edward, which had been left there two or three days previous to her return. It effectually removed every doubt that lurked in her mind respecting the diminution of his attachment: but it was written with an affectation of gaiety, and in a style so

perplexed and incoherent, that she felt almost alarmed.

Edward's gaiety seemed of that species which is often counterfeited, to conceal internal anguish; or like convulsive laughter during a paroxysm of pain. He told her that he had been at several very crowded assemblies, and that he could no longer exist without society, for that reflection and solitude were become insupportable to him.

Laura perceived with affright that he was plunging into the vortex of dissipation, to suppress the agonies of thought; not aware that the cup of pleasure contains no antidote against mental suffering, unless quaffed to the very dregs, till it imbrutes all the finer faculties of the soul. She wished to

convince him of this important truth; but she thought it would be presumption to speak the language of monition to one whose intellect was so much more highly cultivated than her own; however, feeling, at the same time, that should Edward deviate from the paths of morality, he would be led astray by an hopeless passion that herself had raised and cherished, she banished all her scruples, and wrote to him as follows:

‘ Congratulate me, my friend, for I am once more at the cottage, and shall no longer be obliged to weary myself in society, and to wear a smiling countenance with an aching heart! Your letter was the first object that met my eyes when I entered my apartment:—guess if it received an affec-

tionate welcome !—Alas ! after I had perused it, it failed to convey to my soul those exquisite emotions which I have heretofore experienced on receiving the precious testimonies of your affection. I was no longer able to distinguish those traces of intellectual perfection, those eloquent effusions of tenderness which have so often charmed me into tears. The letter that I then held in my hand contained nothing but the rhapsody of an overheated imagination, and the false deductions of sophistry.

‘ Oh Edward ! if ever I should cease to think you the most amiable, the most exalted of human beings, I should *indeed* be wretched ! Awake, then, I conjure you by the name of our love, from the dangerous lethargy that seems

to spread itself over your reason; from the fatal illusions that would beguile your senses!—Seek not refuge from sorrow amid the haunts of pleasure: for though pleasure may intoxicate awhile, yet it soon loses its obli-viating power, enervates every faculty, and leaves the unhappy sufferer an ir-resisting prey to languor and despond-ence.

‘ Ah! my friend, is it possible that virtuous love can wound the bosom with pangs half so severe as those in-flicted by the stings of self reproach?—and if you deviate from the “right on-ward” path of morality; if you wilfully cloud that bright emanation of the Deity which glows within your breast, —if you proudly arraign his dispensa-

tions;—will not the “ still small voice” of Conscience rise up against you ?

‘ Alas, I read with regret and dismay that you are become a “ votary of pleasure,” and that you “ curse your existence.” Ah! incur not the fabled punishment of Tantalus!—seek not to grasp the alluring goblet of pleasure, for it will vanish in your attempt to seize it, and doom you to unquenchable thirst!—But from the cup of life turn not away with disgust; for the bitter ingredients that it contains are salutary, and it is only rendered nauseous by the dregs of vice.

‘ Edward, I know your heart!—I know that you can never find happiness in mere selfish gratifications, or

in pursuits beneath the dignity of your nature; but O! you possess knowledge, accomplishments, genius—what resources against despair! for in the nice investigations of philosophy, in works of taste, in the exercise of a strong imagination, the soul may frequently abstract itself from the contemplation of its sorrows: then arouse, my friend, its latent energy, lest by inaction it should lose its powers of expansion! Aim at perfection in some noble science!—Study the legislation and interests of your country!—Explore the page of history!

“Go, soar with Newton to th’ empyreal sphere,”

and you will no longer find it necessary to blunt your sensibility by a constant intercourse with “the gay licentious crowd.”

‘ Ah! my Edward, why do you not cherish the noble ambition to become the benefactor of mankind?—to enroll your name in the records of fame with the names of a Robertson, a Bowles, a Fergusson, a Paley: the historians, poets, and moralists who will be blessed in future ages!—You have knowledge and genius to justify the glorious ambition; and O! with what ecstasy I should see you crowned with the wreath of fame! Perhaps you may modestly exclaim, “ that I indulge the visions of a romantic girl, who from the storehouse of fancy bedecks the ‘ God of her idolatry’ with every attribute of perfection.” But at least, my friend, suffer me to recommend *one* antidote against sorrow, which is suited to every degree of intellect:—the exercise of—
 CHARITY: that charity which “ suf-

fereth all things—hopeth all things—” which draws down “the blessing of him who was ready to perish, and maketh the widow’s heart to leap for joy.”

‘ Ah! Edward, if it were in your power to raise a smile on the pallid cheek of affliction, would it not convey a sweeter solace to your heart than the smile that dimples round the lips of beauty;—than all those “flashes of merriment that are wont to set the table in a roar?”—Yes! my imagination absolutely refuses to associate you with the frivolous votaries of dissipation. I know that your soul was formed to delight in the tender offices of human kindness, and in the acquisition of knowledge; but never to seek or find happiness in the abuse of its noble faculties.

Write to me soon, I intreat you!—
Convince me that you are no longer
under the dominion of passion;—and
forgive this tedious admonitory epistle
from your devoted

‘LAURA.’

CHAP. XXVIII.

‘ Friendship and Love, his cottage guests, receive him
With honest welcome, and with smile serene.

* * * * *

‘ Ah ! happy swain, such bliss to me denying :
Fortune thy lot with envy bids me view !’

IN the course of a few days Laura received a letter, containing the agreeable assurance that her arguments had produced their desired effect on the mind of her lover. For two or three months nothing material occurred to interrupt the current of that tender melancholy, which she rather indulged than checked; for she felt with Ossian, that ‘ there is a joy in grief, when peace dwells in the breast of the sad.’

At the return of Spring a sensation of pleasure began to revive in her heart. The woods were now decked with innumerable tints of early green; primroses and violets enamelled every bank, while their soft perfumes floated on the breeze, and nightingales began to trill forth the sweetest of all melodies. Laura could not ramble amid scenes like these, without experiencing somewhat of that pure spontaneous felicity, which the charms of Nature are wont to communicate to every feeling heart.

It was the beginning of May, and one fine evening, allured by the beauties that surrounded her, she wandered through the wood till she came to a meadow fertilized by little streams, issuing from a broad winding river, that was employed for the purposes of

inland navigation, and, after a meandering course of some miles, advanced even to the walls of Hinton, the town where Edward had been constrained to take up his abode. Laura felt a kind of romantic pleasure as she walked along the chalky path-way. 'Ah!' thought she, 'the eyes of my beloved are often fixed on this river; little does he imagine that I am at this moment wandering on its banks!'

As she proceeded onward, rapt in meditations like these, she was suddenly startled by the exclamation of 'It is indeed Miss Mapleton!' Her mind was so engrossed by the idea of Edward, that she fancied it was his voice, and on looking up felt quite disappointed on perceiving that it was only his servant, honest Harry: how-

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ever, with a benevolent smile, she advanced to meet him; and enquired ‘by what accident she had the pleasure of seeing him in such an unfrequented path?’

‘Not by any accident, thank God!’ replied Harry, ‘though to be sure it’s always safer to trust to my own ten toes than to master’s runaway nags. So I said to him this morning, says I, ‘Indeed, Sir, I begin to feel desperate home-sick; and so, if you please, I’ll make up a little bundle of my clean shirt and sunday coat, and swing it over my shoulders, knapsack-fashion; and so when mess is over I’ll make a quick march to Woodleigh, by the side of the barge river; and I’ll take up my quarters with Lucy, and father and mother, for a few days, as long as your

Honour can spare me. And so, my master answered and said to me, says he, " Harry, you are a lucky fellow! go and be happy!"—and then he fetched a deep sigh. To be sure that's neither here nor there; but I remember the time when he always used to smile when he gave me leave to take my pleasure a sundays and holidays: but for my part, I can't think what's come to him of late, for he never smiles now; and yet somehow or other he oftener than ever breaks out into a loud laugh, when he's with the other officers, and all about nothing at all: for I hears their jokes when I waits at the mess, and I'm sure there an't a bit of fun in them. And then when he comes home at night he looks so doleful, and sighs so, I declare it goes to my very heart.

‘ Ah! Miss Laura,’ continued Harry, with an arch smile, ‘ I’m afraid you be a very cruel, hard-hearted young lady; for all you looks so good tempered; and for certain sure you have got the faithfulest sweetheart in all the country round. If you did *but* see how all the fine ladies quite runs after him, as a body may say; and then they are all so handsome, with large shining eyes, and rosy cheeks, and coal black curling hair; and all covered with gold and silver, and earbobs and necklaces, and such like. To be sure at first, master couldn’t be so unp’lite as to refuse for to dance with ’em, and to talk to ’em, and so forth; and he used to go to balls and suppers; and them there sort of things; and, to own the truth, he did now and then come home half-seas over: but even then he thought upon you,

Miss Laura, for I have heard him mutter out your name, and very often he put his hand to his forehead, and walked up and down the room, miscalling himself a brute, and such like: but within these two or three months he spends his time in quite another guess manner; he shuts himself up in his own room all the morning; and in an evening he takes a lonely walk, or perhaps a ride; for all of a sudden he pretends to be very fond of fishing; and he takes his horse, and leaves it at a village, some way lower down on the banks of this river; and he then goes to angle for trout; but I'm sure he has terrible bad sport, and I believe in my conscience that he only makes it an excuse to get away from people he don't care for. He meant to ride out this even-

ing, and perhaps he an't far off at this very minute.'

Laura seized the first pause that occurred in Harry's valuable and interesting harangue, to enquire 'if he had not brought her a letter?'

'O yes! ma'am!' replied he, 'here it is; and what a fool I must be, to stand prating here at such a rate without thinking to give it you; and I'm sure it does one's heart and soul good to receive a letter from any body one loves! Lucy writes to me,—God bless her!—every time farmer Harney's team comes to Hinton with corn.—O! how happy I shall be to see her!—she won't expect me; and I'll go in at the little wicket at the bottom of the garden. Father won't be come home; mother

will be getting supper ready; and my dear, dear wife will be spinning at the cottage door. Then I'll creep up, slowly—softly—and she won't see me till I throw my arms round her neck, and almost stifle her with kisses.'

Harry was so eager to execute this delightful project, that he even forgot to take his leave of Miss Mapléton, and ran off through the meadow, till he was quite out of sight. Laura followed him with her eyes, and was almost tempted to exclaim, 'O how I envy him his feelings!' but in order to check afflicting comparisons, she hastily perused her letter, and no longer felt herself unhappy. The beauty of the landscape; the zephyrs that, sporting around, dispersed at intervals the mild odour of cowslips and white thorn; the lowing of distant herds; the gurgling of the

waters—all soothed her mind to pensive pleasure; but most those artless testimonies of her lover's affection that she had just received from Harry.

The idea so hastily suggested, that Edward might even at that moment be wandering in the same path, was sufficient to raise the enthusiasm of her fancy; and seating herself on the bank, she gazed awhile intently on the river, then pourtrayed her reveries in the following lines.

The setting sun still lingers in the mead,
 And gilds the landscape with his parting beam;
 Yon lowing heifers 'ruminating' feed,
 And gentle breezes curl the winding stream;
 Along whose banks, with lingering steps, I love
 To wander, musing, at the close of day.
 And now perchance my Edward here may rove,
 To snare with wily skill the finny prey.
 In fancy I behold him pensive bend,
 Beside the river where tall woods are seen,

And o'er the glassy surface wide extend
 Their soft reflected tints of early green.
 The treach'rous angle quivers in his hand,
 But little does the wonted sport delight;
 And oft 'he gazes vacant' on the land,
 And oft the starting tear bedims his sight.

Ah! at this moment does he think on me?
 Does he in silent solitude deplore
 That unrelenting, that severe decree,
 Which harshly told us we should meet no more?

Yes! Fancy brings his image to my view,
 As when indignant Fortune bade us part:
 Still paints him virtuous, noble, tender, true,
 Just as he look'd when first he won my heart.

Alas! to think how very short a space
 Divides us now!—we both may stray
 Along this river,—and I now may trace
 His wandering footsteps on the chalky way.

Mournful I gaze upon the rippling tide,
 And, lost in anguish'd thought, I senseless cry,

'I envy thee, O stream! for thou wilt glide,
 'And meet the glances of my Edward's eye.

'Should he upon thy mossy bank recline,
 'Sweet winding river! murmur in his ear
 'These vows sincere, these tender sighs of mine,
 'And tell him thou art fraught with many a tear;

'Tell him, that tho' we must for ever part,
 'Thro' time and space his image will endure;
 'And still be cherish'd at my faithful heart;
 'For, like thy stream, my love is deep and pure.'

CHAP. XXIX,

‘ C’est commode de connoître les lieux où sont les gens à qui l’on pense souvent. Ne savoir où les prendre fait une obscurité qui blesse l’imagination.

AT the expiration of a week, when Harry called to take his farewell of Miss Mapleton, she entrusted him with the following letter for his master :

‘ I feel it such a sweet occupation to write to you, my Edward, that though I have nothing to tell you but that I love you, and think of you perpetually,

I seize every opportunity of repeating these truths, which you have already heard a thousand and a thousand times. I do not fear that you should complain of my tautology; and while I seem as if I were talking to you, I almost forget our mutual affliction. Then, after I have dispatched my letter, I calculate the time at which you will receive it, and when the time arrives, I secretly exclaim—‘ At this moment Edward is thinking of me!’ Do not smile!—for you well know that the merest trifles become matters of infinite importance, when the heart is deeply interested — Yes, indeed, you say truly that “ absence increases a strong passion.”—I did not think of you with such ineffable tenderness while I was with you, as I have since done, when in silence and solitude I have ‘ communed with my own heart,’ and contemplated your

image decked in all those amiable qualities which so irresistibly attracted my admiration and my love.

‘ Perhaps my fancy has since added embellishments of her own, for perfection is not the lot of mortality: but your portrait, thus heightened in its colouring by the touches of Fancy, precious for its intrinsic value, and mellowed by the hand of Time, is viewed “ in my mind’s eyes ” with emotions even more tender than those which the original was wont to excite.—And yet, my friend, there are moments when the contemplation ceases to charm!—when I feel sensations that border on despair.’

‘ To know that you are so near me; to breathe the same air;—to be sepa-

rated only by a few hills and vallies, and yet to have no more hope of seeing you than if whole oceans rolled between us—O! it inflicts a pang like the thought of eternal separation!—And shall I never again listen to the tender modulations of your voice?—those soft tremulous tones that have vibrated in an instant through all my nerves!—Shall I never more enjoy that expressive silence when “the soul speaks, though the tongue is mute?” As soon as I came to that part of your letter which contains the account of your nocturnal expedition to the cottage, and your disappointment at not perceiving a glimmering of light through my casement, I could not avoid shedding tears. I believe it was fortunate that I happened at that time to be from home. I might have discerned your figure among the

trees!—I should have talked to you a few minutes from the casement, and probably we should have been discovered.

“My Edward, I beg you not to repeat your visits!—I should hazard too much; and I have such an aversion from every appearance of deceit, that it is utterly repugnant to my feelings to grant you a clandestine interview. Let us both beware of taking one step in a path that may lead to repentance.

“’Tis better to endure the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of!” Perhaps you may here exclaim, “What worse evil can befall us than to live for ever separated from each other?” Ah, my friend! we should both be still more wretched, if we were to lose that aerial

tenderness, that exaltation of sentiment which dignifies our love!—if you were only to behold in your Laura a poor fond girl, who could condescend to veil her deeds in mystery, who could violate a sacred promise, and cowardly refuse to preserve the author of her being from disgrace and misery.

‘ Heaven knows I am far from possessing that stoicism of which you have accused me ! There are moments when a thought, a sound, the most distant allusion to former days, will bedim my eyes with those tears “ that bitter from the fount of memory fall : ” and even to hear by accident the name of the town which you inhabit causes me a painful emotion.

‘ The other day, when I was returning from my walk, a heavy shower of

rain obliged me to take shelter under a large chesnut tree: it instantly reminded me of that ever memorable tree which bears the testimony of your affection, and I remained fixed to the spot, regardless of the large drops that pattered through the scarcely expanded leaves. I had not been long there before a poor peasant, all dripping wet, came to shelter himself beside me.

“Terrible bad weather!” muttered he to himself, “and I ha’ got to walk down the barge river to Hinton and back again afore night!” Perhaps you will laugh when I tell you that I gazed after him with a look of envy, as he proceeded on his journey.

‘ Since I wrote to you last, I have made a delightful discovery. Invited

by the beauties of the Spring, I have lately taken very long rambles; and one morning, when the sun was shining in full splendour, I wandered a considerable time through the wood, till I suddenly perceived that I had lost my way, and that I knew not by what path to return home: however, I proceeded straight forward, and soon found myself on a wide common, at the foot of a steep hill, covered with heath, whose russet hue was here and there enlivened by golden broom, hare-bells, and other wild flowers. The bright blue sky seemed to rest on its summit; but fatigued as I was, I determined to ascend the abrupt acclivity, for I knew that it commanded a noble and extensive prospect, and I did not regret the wearisome steps I had taken, when I at length turned and gazed around me over a vast

extent of country :—green meadows, meandering rivers, spreading woods, white cottages, all glittering in the noon-beams. A dark cloud loomed behind the distant perspective, and the sun shone forth with such brightness that the most remote objects were easily distinguishable. I anxiously threw my eyes around to see if I could discover any traces of the spot where you dwell; and I soon descried the tall spire of Hinton church, on which the sun was reflected with unusual brightness. My heart recognized it as if I had beheld the countenance of a friend. I thought of you!—the thought was mingled with rapture; yet tears came into my eyes, and I hastily wiped them away, that they might not obscure my sight. Ah! what would I have given to have annihilated the space that separated

us!—how I longed for “the wings of a dove!”

‘ Since that morning, it is become one of my greatest pleasures to climb to the summit of this hill: the air that I there breathe seems to revive me, and while I gaze around, I forget for a time all that I have suffered, and am still doomed to suffer. During one of these rare moments of tranquility, I endeavoured to pourtray my feelings in the following sonnet, with which I will now conclude this long letter.

‘ LAURA.’

Often I climb, with weary steps and slow,
Yon rugged steep; and then I bend my way
Along the heath, while all the vale below
Beams with the lustre of meridian day:
Woods, rivers, lawns, and distant hills look gay,
Around my feet the purple heath flow’rs grow,
The sky-lark carols forth a cheering lay,
And on my cheek the balmy zephyrs blow;

Ah! then awhile my heart forgets to sigh
O'er 'sober certainty' and blank despair!
Hope, for a moment, animates my eye;
And in the distant scene, with anxious care,
I trace a fane that glitters in the sky—
Then cry with secret rapture, 'HE is there!'

CHAP. XXX.

‘ I cannot speak my bliss! ’tis in my head,
 ’Tis in my heart, and takes up all my fancy.’

IN a few days Laura received a letter from Edward, but she opened it with unusual perturbation, for it appeared as if it had been folded up in the greatest haste, and the superscription was scarcely legible. Her eye glanced eagerly over the first words, and with impatient delight she read as follows :

‘ Joy ! joy ! unutterable joy !—Laura, my adored Laura, we shall at length be happy !—Heaven has taken pity on our

sorrows!—How shall I ever gain sufficient composure to tell you of the felicity that awaits us!—my senses are quite bewildered!—At one moment I could weep like a child: at another I walk, I run, I sing, I laugh, and am verily intoxicated with excess of pleasure!

‘Is it really possible that I shall live to call you *mine*?—to look at you with fond exultation, and exclaim, “she is my wife!—she is mine for ever and ever!”

‘O Laura, when I gaze on your soft blue eyes, “even to dotage”—when I see the rosy tint of love mantling on on your cheek—when, for the first time in my life, I venture to press my lips on yours!—In those moments of ec-

stacy it will not be your beauty, but your heart that I shall idolize; its ineffable tenderness and the elevation of your mind will justify the excess of my adoration.

‘ Ah ! my best beloved, you know not the agonies I have endured since we parted !—yet during our last interview you witnessed the frantic tumults of my passion : you pitied me !—Tears started into your eyes, but you felt not like me the terrible tortures of despair. Ah ! how changed are my present sensations !

‘ Rejoice with me !—rejoice with me ! Colonel Somerville will no longer presume to fetter your affections ! I am now rich—I possess a large estate—and Q (rapture is in the thought !) I shall

raise the beloved of my soul to her former rank in life ! She loved me in sorrow and poverty, and all the treasures of Peru would not be so precious to me as *one* tear that she has shed for my sake.'

' A distant relation of mine, who lately died at Jamaica, has named me his sole heir. I have just received a letter from his executors, who order me to embark immediately, to take possession of my property. O Laura! my adored Laura! a few short months will swiftly pass away, and then - - - -

' I fear I have written a very incoherent letter:—but you will understand it—the language of happiness is all eloquent. Ah! my beloved, when you read these lines, will your heart throb

with unutterable rapture as mine does at this moment?—will the crimson tide of joy rush into your cheeks?—will every nerve tremble with ecstasy?—No!—you have never loved, even to madness, as I have done!—you have never felt the delirium of passion!—you know nothing of the ineffable sensations I experienced during that eventful evening, when you sunk, o'erwhelm'd with terror, into my arms; like a child who seeks to hide its cherub face on the bosom of its nurse.—Yes! your love for me is pure as the smiles of cradled infancy! O you are all virtue, all beauty, all perfection!—But why do I thus exhale my feelings in words—mere words—that are always too weak to paint excess of joy?—Why, my own Laura, am I not already at your feet?—Why do I not hasten to

press you to my bosom, and to convince you by looks of unutterable affection, and incoherent sounds of rapture, that your Edward has a soul that can duly estimate the blessings that await him.'

CHAP. XXXI.

' From incoherent words and sighs,
 Such wond'rous transports break,
 Far more than honied Eloquence,
 With all her tongues, can speak :
 And now with strong inquiring look,
 They search each other's eye,
 And ask if what they see be true,
 And doubt the real joy.'

THOSE only who have felt the extremes of love, despair, and joy, can picture to themselves the emotions of Laura, while she perused this letter. Happiness had been so long a stranger to her heart, that she almost fainted at the violent transition of her feelings. She attempted to reach a chair at the opposite side of the room; but she

trembled so much that she was obliged to lean for support against the frame of the open casement.

In a few minutes the air revived her to the delicious, unwonted consciousness of felicity; and she unfastened the door that led into the garden, that she might convey the joyful tidings to her father. He was not there; and she continued her walk in the hope of meeting him, till she found herself almost in the middle of the wood. She proceeded with hasty steps, but perceiving that her search was fruitless, she turned, and walked slowly homeward, with her eyes intently fixed on the precious letter that she still held in her hand.

Absorbed in delightful contemplation, she did not observe that any one

was advancing towards her, till all on a sudden the paper was snatched from her. She started—looked up—and beheld Edward at her feet.

The surprise, the delight of seeing her lover again, after such a long absence,—the agitation her delicate frame had previously sustained,—all these causes united, operated so forcibly on her nerves, that she instantly burst forth into a loud hysterical laugh; then sobbed violently, and endeavoured to speak, but could not articulate a word.

Edward felt alarmed, and gently supported her to a kind of rustic bench, formed from the fantastic roots of an old oak; then hastily untying the ribbon that confined her straw hat, he gazed on her for some moments without

speaking. Never had she appeared more beautiful! Her auburn hair hung in wild luxuriance over her face; she had ceased to weep, but tears still glistened in her languishing blue eyes, as with a smile of ineffable tenderness she fixed them on her lover; until perceiving the ardent and rapturous expression that glowed in his countenance, she timidly cast them down, while 'the hectic of a moment' passed over her cheek.

'I fear I have alarmed you, my Laura!' cried Edward, pressing her hand to his heart; 'speak to me, my beloved!—let me hear the sound of your voice; I could almost fancy that I am in a dream! Is it really possible that I see you, that I touch you, that you are mine for ever?'

Laura gently disengaging herself from his arms, exclaimed, in a tremulous voice, ' my Edward, how often have I sighed for such a moment as this! I thought I should never have seen you again! This unexpected happiness quite overpowers me! O! I have a thousand things to say to you,—but I forget them all!

' I believe that you were reading my letter when I met you,' replied Edward. ' I did not tell you that I was coming to the cottage, because I wished to surprise you. But the paleness of your countenance reproaches me!—Ah! how interesting to me is the languor of your appearance: I feared that you had suffered much; but you did not tell me that your health was injured!'

‘ I did not wish to afflict you,’ interrupted Laura; ‘ besides, my illness was very gradual; and as I despaired of a cure, I never complained, though the canker-worm preyed on my heart, and stole the colour from my cheek. But away with these gloomy retrospects!’ continued she, smiling—‘ I am happy—O *how* happy at this moment!—and have you not told me, that when a few short months are over, we shall meet again, and never more be separated?’

‘ Yes! we will live and die together,’ replied Edward, in a tone of rapture, ‘ and the instant that I return from Jamaica I will fly to the cottage, and our friend the curate shall unite us.’

‘ And my father shall live with us ? ’
said Laura.

‘ Yes!—and I will pay off the mortgages, and we will inhabit the family mansion,’ replied Edward. ‘ I am now in my road to Portsmouth,’ continued he: ‘ I may probably embark the day after to-morrow, and in less than six months’——

‘ Alas!’ interrupted Laura, casting her eyes to the ground, ‘ you are going a long voyage. I cannot bear to think that seas must roll between us!—Those detested West India islands!—that fatal fever——’

Here her voice became inarticulate. A tear fell on Edward’s hand, and from thence penetrated to his soul.

‘ Ah! my beloved!’ cried he, tenderly, ‘ do not embitter these precious moments of hope and happiness!—Look on me—smile on me, that your image may console me during those wearisome hours that I must yet be absent from you!’

‘ Let us hasten to my father,’ exclaimed Laura—‘ let us ask him to join our hands, and to give us his blessing!’

‘ Oh no!—Do not leave me yet!’ replied Edward,—‘ promise me that you will not forget me!—Promise me that you will come here every day to think of me!—Look at me once more!—Speak to me!—We are going to be separated for several tedious months.

O! let me hear again those ecstatic words "Edward, I love you!"

Laura smiled at the earnestness of his manner, and arose from her seat. 'The evening air is rather damp,' observed she, 'and I wish to return home.'

'One moment more,'—cried her lover;—but Laura was inflexible, and he walked on with a discontented countenance, till she suddenly stopped by the side of a little rivulet. 'Look at this stream!' cried she—'Do you not remember, Edward, that I once described it to you?—It is here that I have passed so many melancholy hours: it is here that I have read over all your letters: it is here that I have

often washed away the traces of my tears: and it is here,' continued she, with an arch smile, 'that I joyfully comply with your request, and once more exclaim,' 'Edward, I love you!'

Utterly unable to restrain his emotions at this delightful avowal, Edward seized her hand, drew her close to his palpitating heart, and snatched a hasty kiss from her rosy lips. It was the first kiss that Love had ever imprinted there; and Laura disengaged herself from his embrace in the greatest confusion, although she did not affect to chide. Hand in hand they continued to walk on in silence; (for at such moments how insipid is all language!) and when they opened the garden wicket, they perceived Sir Robert advancing towards them. He

appeared in high spirits, and was not at all surprised at meeting them together, for he had heard the joyful news from Harry, whom he had just quitted in the village, 'right glad at his master's good fortune, but mortal sorry to leave Lucy, to go into foreign parts.'

As soon as they reached the glass door that opened into the cottage, Edward stopped; and, as if summoning up all his resolution to ward off the pain of parting, hastily exclaimed—
 'I cannot enter—I must be at Portsmouth to-morrow morning, and I see that my horse is already at the gate.'

'I am sorry,' replied Sir Robert, 'that you cannot stay longer. I have a thousand questions to ask: but as I

see you are so very impatient to be gone I will not detain you. Farewell, then! God grant that you may soon return to bless my poor Laura! She has been a good daughter, and she deserves to be a happy wife!—He then joined their hands, and exclaimed, ‘Heaven prosper you together!’

Edward took a ring from his finger, saying, in hurried accents, ‘Wear this, my only love, and do not take it off till my return. Whenever you feel dejected, look at it, and anticipate the joyful moment that will re-unite us.’

At the conclusion of these words he suddenly let fall her hand, swiftly darted round the corner of the house—never once ventured to look back, but

mounted his horse, and galloped off at full speed.

Laura could with difficulty restrain her tears; but when the agitation of parting had a little subsided, she entered the cottage with a heart that beat high with delight: and continued conversing with her father, till a late hour, on the bright prospects that now opened to their view.

CHAP. XXXII.

‘ Oh ! felice fortunato
 Chi ti siegue Dio d’Amor!
 Infelice sfortunato
 Chi ti fugge per timor!’

IT is sometimes said that perfect happiness is never known on earth: but surely those who have loved, despaired, then suddenly attained the summit of their wishes, will say that the assertion is untrue: and probably, if they were permitted to rescue from the gulph of Time the hours that had afforded them the most exquisite delight, they would prefer that precious

interval between promised joy and its completion; those white-winged hours when 'Hope enchanted smil'd.'

Laura was now completely happy: she doubted not but that her lover would speedily return, and she did not suffer her imagination to dwell on the difficulties and dangers that might probably await him in a foreign country, and in an unfavourable climate. She was naturally of a cheerful serene temper, and prone to view objects under their most agreeable aspect. She passed several weeks without hearing from Edward; but she knew that his silence was unavoidable, therefore it did not alarm her; and she amused herself in planning schemes that were to be realized on his return. Laura did not feel distressed at the idea of owing

every thing she possessed to her lover; for she had heretofore proved to him that she loved him only for himself. She had nothing further to apprehend from Colonel Somerville: Edward would soon be enabled to cancel her father's debts, and then she would be at perfect liberty.

The more she reflected on her past conduct, the more was she rejoiced that she had never swerved from the path of duty. She was now certain that she possessed the perfect esteem of Edward, which, by the slightest deviation from propriety, she might have forfeited for ever:—and is it not far more delicious to exult in the admiration, the tender respect of a lover, than to listen to the most passionate exclamations, the most languishing

sighs, that were ever poured forth at the feet of yielding beauty?—Love, without esteem, is like a precious odour, that, when not repressed, soon ‘palls on the sense,’ loses its pure etherial spirit, and leaves nothing behind it but particles gross and earthy.

Laura prosecuted her studies with all the enthusiasm of that tender emotion which incites to the attainment of every perfection. When she was sketching the beautiful scenery around her, the image of Edward no longer had bedimmed her eyes with tears; on the contrary, it seemed to guide her pencil. When she played on her harp, she no longer selected the most simple airs, but taught her fingers to wander through all the most difficult mazes of harmony. Sometimes, as if

by inspiration, she would draw from it the sweetest sounds of her own combination, and one morning, after a little reflection, she struck the chords, and sung the following words :

Awake, my Harp, some joyful measure !

No longer breathe a pensive strain ;

Be, like my soul, attun'd to pleasure,

And never mourn again !

Awake, my Harp, some joyful measure !

'Twas LOVE that taught thy strings to move ;

And LOVE now fills my soul with pleasure—

Then hymn the charms of Love !

' O LOVE ! some call thy musings folly,

Some call thee cruel, base, and blind ;

But thou, methinks, art pure and holy,

Exalted, rais'd, refin'd !

And some there are who can dissemble

The raptures of thy ardent flame ;

And some poor maidens start and tremble,

If they but hear thy name.

Ah ! tho' thy charms were all illusion,

Such dear deceits I still would seek !

Thy mantling blush, thy soft confusion,

Thy looks that more than speak.

Thou know'st, O LOVE ! how I have blest thee,

How oft for thee my heart hath beat,

How oft in sorrow I've cared thee,

And thought thy sorrow sweet !

O Love! some call thy musings folly;
 Some call thee cruel, base, and blind;
 But thou, methinks, art pure and holy,
 Exalted, rais'd, refin'd!

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CHAP. XXXIII.

Devroit haïr ce qui la blesse,
Mais ne le peut, ne sait qu'aimer.

WEEK after week elapsed, and Laura did not receive any intelligence from Edward: however, she consoled herself by anticipating the arrival of the packets; and the time did not appear tedious to her:—for when the mind is engrossed by any delightful occupation, hours and days glide off unheeded.

Sir Robert, who possessed no such resource against impatience, began to

be very anxious to hear a few more particulars concerning the West India estate. 'To be sure,' thought he, 'it is almost fruitless to talk about money matters to a man who is desperately in love; and yet I might as well have asked Captain Somerville whereabouts his plantations are situated, and how many hogsheads of sugar they are likely to produce in a year. Besides, I never once enquired the name of his relation; nor how it happened that the property was not left first of all to his brother. I hope he may not be set off on a wild-goose chase.'

Such were the reflections of Sir Robert; but luckily he did not communicate them to his daughter; nor did a shadow of doubt obscure the bright

prospect on which her 'mind's eye' now rested with delight and joy. Such was the state of affairs at the cottage, when, one evening, Laura could scarcely credit the evidence of her senses, while she observed her father walking, in earnest conversation, with Colonel Somerville. She trembled, and a sickly apprehension spread itself over her whole frame. She had not once beheld him since the fatal evening he had extorted from her that solemn promise which had cost so many tears, and she turned from the window with alarm and disgust. These emotions were most forcibly marked on her countenance, when Colonel Somerville suddenly opened the door, and entered the room, with an embarrassed and diffident air.

‘ Can you pardon this intrusion, amiable Miss Mapleton?’ exclaimed he, in a hesitating voice. ‘ Can you look on me without shuddering? Alas! I know that I have treated you cruelly; but a long fit of illness has brought me to a sense of my own unworthiness, and I am come to deprecate your anger. But do not frown on me so terribly, or I shall not be able to speak!—Ah! I feel that I deserve your hatred—and yet I think you would pity me if you knew how much I have lately suffered. Many hours of sorrow and sickness have subdued the wild impetuosity of my passions; and when I have passed long sleepless nights, or been tortured with pain, I have called God to witness that, if I should be restored to health, I would no longer molest you, or im-

pede your wishes. Oh! let me again intreat your forgiveness! Suffer me to hope that you will not always detest me!—Suffer me to share your unexpected happiness, to congratulate you, and to love you as a sister!’

‘ *As a sister!*’ cried Laura, casting an interrogating glance on her father.

‘ Yes! yes, my love!’ interrupted he; ‘ Colonel Somerville resigns you to his brother. Come, let us forget and forgive! and for my part I don’t bear malice at all; particularly as he says that, on Edward’s return, we shall once more take possession of our old mansion. Come, Laura, you *must* forgive him:—see how melancholy he looks!’

Sir Robert ceased speaking, and Colonel Somerville endeavoured to take her hand; but she recoiled back, with an air of irresolution and distrust.

‘ I deserve this treatment,’ cried he, in a disconsolate tone; ‘ but, indeed, Miss Mapleton, you shall find that I am quite an altered being:—and oh! if you will not forgive me, for my own sake, recollect that I am the brother of Edward!’

At these words Laura, with a faint smile and rosy blush, extended her hand, in token of reconciliation; though she trembled violently, and cast down her eyes to the ground.

‘ Your goodness enchants me, amiable Miss Mapleton,’ cried the Colonel,

respectfully kissing her hand; ‘and believe me, I am so entirely awakened from the illusions of passion, that it will even give me pleasure to place this beautiful hand within my brother’s before the sacred altar; and it shall be the great aim of my future life to atone to you both for the sorrows I have heretofore occasioned you.’

‘Bravo!’ exclaimed Sir Robert; ‘and now, Laura, since you have behaved like a good girl, you deserve a sugar-plum, and see here what I have brought you.’

‘O! give it me! give it me, directly!’ cried Laura—‘it is a letter from Edward!’

‘I have just brought it from the post-office,’ answered Sir Robert; ‘and

'as I dare say you are very impatient to read it, you had better take it into your own room, but do not stay there too long. Come down again soon, to make tea for us ; and then probably you will communicate to us some of its contents.'

Laura joyfully availed herself of this permission, and, snatching the letter from her father, hastily ran up stairs.

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CHAP. XXXIV.

*‘ Leggiela cento volte e non si satia,
E con dolci sospiri Amor ringratia.’*

WHEN Laura again entered the parlour, it was easy to discern that she had been weeping; and Sir Robert looked alarmed, for, being himself wholly unused to the melting mood, he knew not that joy as well as sorrow has its tears. His anxiety, however, was soon dissipated, for when Laura presented to him Edward's letter, her countenance beamed with an heavenly smile; yet she sighed, as if to relieve

her oppressed heart, and a tear that was gliding down her cheek fell on her neck. She looked like a rose, when a gentle gale has dispersed the dew drops that glistened on it.

Turning to Colonel Somerville, she exclaimed, in the sweetest accents, ' Pardon me if I have for an instant suspected the sincerity of your professions!—My doubts are now all removed; and your present conduct to Edward atones for your former unkindness. He tells me in his letter that you rejoice in his good fortune; that you have advanced him considerable sums of money, and exerted all your interest to speed his return. Alas! I fear he is so involved in business, that it will be yet several months before he is able to settle his affairs. But let me

not complain, while I have such a delightful prospect before me, and the sweet conviction that the “ joys of meeting pay the pangs of absence !”

Harmony now seemed to reign between all parties; and when they had fully discussed the subject that most interested them, they began to discourse on indifferent topics.

‘ I quite blush,’ exclaimed Colonel Somerville, ‘ when I look out of the window, to see in what a dismal solitude you have been condemned to pass the winter. I fear, Sir Robert, that you have had some difficulty to get rid of the great enemy; but as for Miss Mapleton, I flatter myself that she has beguiled many tedious hours by gazing on the “ multitudinous ocean,” and by

addressing sonnets to the moon.—Nay, do not look grave, Miss Mapleton!—Believe me, I sincerely admire your talents; but as the Gods have not vouchsafed to endow me with an atom of poetic fancy, surely I may be allowed to depreciate the value of such gifts: it is the only consolation we matter-of-fact people possess. You children of imagination are all day-dreamers; but I sometimes wish that I were equally visionary, and could cheat myself into a sensation resembling happiness. Alas! to the reasoning man happiness appears a mere chimera! The world is full of misery!—Human nature is naturally depraved!—We are mere machines, acted upon by the irresistible laws of necessity!—And is there a being who does not feel a secret gratification, when he hears of the misfortunes of

others? And what is friendship but a name—a shadow, most justly said to follow wealth and power? for I have lately been quite *persecuted* with friends. Even supposing that one is not tormented by the contemplation of these gloomy certainties, what does this world possess, to recompense one for the trouble of existence? What is there that is worth a wish? With respect to myself, my situation in life is undoubtedly prosperous: I am young, I have a tolerable understanding, and am very rich.—But of what avail are the possessions of youth, sense, and fortune, if they cannot procure happiness? I have made the tour of Europe; I have associated with the elegant, the learned, the voluptuous; but life appears to me “as wearisome as a tale twice told.” I eat—I drink—I

sleep,—so does an oyster :—and I am sometimes almost tempted to shoot myself, through very *ennui*.’

‘ Good God ! how shocking ! ’—involuntarily exclaimed Laura; then suddenly checking herself, she calmly continued: ‘ I am not surprised that you are unhappy; your feelings are the result of your principles; and I flatter myself that those principles are erroneous. Had you more respect for human nature, you would wish to gain the esteem and applause of those with whom you are connected by the bonds of society. Such a noble ambition would stimulate your exertions to promote the interests of that society ; and you would no longer need a pursuit to occupy those many hours when cor-

poreal wants are satisfied, but the soul languishes for intellectual food. You despise your fellow-creatures:—Ah! if you loved them, Happiness would no longer fly from you; she would appear to you under her most alluring form, decorated in the smiles and tears of those relieved from poverty and sorrow.'

' Spoken like the heroine of a German drama,' retorted Colonel Somerville. ' By the way, I presume that we shall soon learn politeness from the Dutch, since the Germans have taught all our young ladies and gentlemen to talk sentiment. Words!—mere high-sounding nonsense! I wonder, Miss Mapleton, that you can read such trash.'

Goethe

‘I am no critic,’ replied Laura;
‘and though the plays in question may
offend against all the laws of Aristotle,
I own they delight me. A single
beauty compensates for many defects;
and if a book amuse and interest me,
I feel in good humour with the author:
but when beautiful imagery, exquisite
pathos, and sublime conceptions em-
bellish the maxims of morality;—when,
after the perusal of any composition,
I feel a glow at my heart, and a desire
to become more amiable and virtuous;
it is then indeed that I feel truly grate-
ful to the writer whose magic style has
power to raise such sweet emotions.
I rejoice at his fame, and my soul bears
testimony that he has deserved well of
every country where his works are
known.’

‘ A very warm panegyric indeed ! ’
exclaimed the Colonel, ‘ and quite
unique, for I believe it is the first time
that the Germans were ever admired
for the morality of their productions.’

‘ I do not speak from what I hear,’
replied Laura; ‘ I only judge from the
impression they produce on my own
feelings.’

Here the conversation ended ; for
night was coming on, and Colonel So-
merville prepared to leave the cottage.
He was sorry that he had said so much
in opposition to the opinions of Miss
Mapleton; particularly as it had been
his firm intention to adopt the lan-
guage and manners that he thought
the most congenial to her taste: how-
ever, he soon forgot his resolution; for

he was one of those people who, having long indulged a particular train of ideas, sport their favourite opinion on all occasions, even to their own detriment ; until, by frequent repetition, it becomes so familiar, that it seems almost to break forth from them involuntarily, as if by a mechanical impulse.

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CHAP. XXXV.

' Si en quelque sejour
Soit en bois ou en pré
Soit pour l'aube de jour,
Ou soit pour la vesprée ;
Sans cesse mon cœur sent
Le regret d'un absent.'

DURING the course of the summer, Colonel Somerville often repeated his visits at the cottage: and though his principles and opinions were totally repugnant to the feelings of Laura, his address was so particularly elegant, his manners were so respectful and insinuating, that she began to look at him without aversion; and imagined

that his character was greatly reformed.

He often wished to persuade Sir Robert to take lodgings at some fashionable watering-place; but to this scheme Laura always opposed a decided negative; particularly as the allowance they received was too small to admit of such additional expence; and she did not choose to incur any pecuniary obligation from Colonel Somerville.

Before the end of the autumn Laura received two or three letters from Edward; but they were not written with all that ardour of affection she had reason to expect. He mentioned a great deal about the fine estate that had come into his possession; declared that it would be impossible for him to

return to England before the ensuing spring; and concluded his last letter by saying, ' that he wrote in great haste, for that he was going to dress for a ball, at which he was to dance with a newly discovered beautiful little cousin.'

An emotion of doubt and jealousy glanced on the heart of Laura as she perused these lines; but she instantly repelled it, for she felt as if it would be almost a crime to suspect the truth of her lover: therefore hastily suppressing a sigh, she determined that no appearance of ungenerous distrust should lurk in the following letter :

' I have written to you very frequently, my Edward; but I fear that you have not received all my packets; for I have

asked you a thousand questions, which you have neglected to answer. Perhaps you thought them frivolous. Ah! you ought to know that the merest trifle that interests you is to me a matter of the highest importance!

‘ Surely you will be able to return to England before the spring!—How little did I think, when we parted, that twelve tedious months must pass away before I should again behold you—And when we parted, I did not shed a tear!——

‘ Alas! what a dreary winter I shall pass! My favourite walks will soon appear desolate; and while snow obstructs the entrance to our cottage, and bleak north winds howl through the

casements, how shall I regret that you
are not with me! for

‘The stormy wind, the pelting show’r
Could not disturb my rapt’rous hour,
Or ever gloom my mind with *such* a friend.’

‘O! my Edward, I almost doubt the
reality of what has happened!—I sit
and muse until the feelings of my heart
overwhelm reflection. I put my hand
to my head, and can scarcely per-
suade myself that I am not deluded by
some delightful dream.

‘The weather is now very fine (tho’
the autumnal tints begin to spread
themselves over the woods), and I
spend many hours in that beautiful
dale through which the rivulet mean-
ders; but my favourite seat is at the
foot of the old oak, where I first heard

you speak, and saw you smile, after our long absence. It is there that you told me to think of you; as if I did not think of you in every place! However, it is a charming spot: the tree is encircled with woodbine; I often sit beneath its shade, look at my ring, and breathe a silent aspiration of gratitude to 'that Being who gave us hearts of sympathy, and would not suffer those hearts to be for ever rent asunder.'

'Yes, my Edward! we were surely destined for each other! (Do not smile at the superstition of love!)—I think what you think—I feel what you feel—and all our pursuits and hopes in life assimilate. Will it not be delightful to dwell for ever together under the same roof?—to wander arm in arm together through the same walks?—Me.

thinks I shall never hear your distant voice, or even the sound of your footsteps, without a thrill of pleasure!— And yet I should often wish you to quit me, and to seek health and pleasure amid the manly sports of the field, or knowledge in the retirement of your study: for listlessness is a great foe to love; and it would be doubly sweet to see you again after a short absence. I would run to meet you; perhaps gently upbraid you: then, after we had partaken our social repast, I would sing to you, or read to you some book in unison with my feelings; and when I came to any passage descriptive of domestic felicity, I would gaze at you with conscious rapture, then turn my eyes towards Heaven, and smile forth a silent thanksgiving.

‘ Such, my best friend, are the day-dreams I now indulge:—ah! when will you return to realize them? I dread the approach of winter!—“Imagination expires amid frost and snow,” or wears the sombre aspect of surrounding objects. I shall fear that you are ill; I shall fear that you cease to think of me. In short, I shall fear a thousand improbabilities: but at present my spirits are gay, and I see things as they really are.

‘ You know, my Edward, that I am very much under the dominion of “skyey influence,” and that I am generally cheerful when all nature around me is cheerful. I now walk in the woods, and it gives me pleasure to see the woodbine and wild roses blooming around me. I walk into the harvest-

field, and listen to the song of the reaper. I ramble on the sea shore, gaze on the distant sail that glitters in the sun-beams, think of you, and am happy. But how shall I beguile the tedious hours of absence when the bitter blasts of December confine me to the cottage; or when, if I venture forth, every scene that reminded me of you will appear changed and mournful?—When the rivulet will be frozen over—the withered leaves of my favourite oak will rustle in my path?

‘ Fortunately I possess a charming companion, who will not quit me during the winter. From the following description, I think you may guess whom I mean. Are you not intimately acquainted with one who, though not handsome, has an expression of coun-

tenance far more touching than beauty; around whose lips the smile of benevolence and sweetness is perpetually dimpling; whose light brown hair enlivens a complexion that is rather pale; and whose eyes beam with a pensive softness, as if the tear of love or pity had somewhat dimmed their lustre?

‘ Do you not recognize my companion?—Ah! my dear Edward, it is your own portrait: I have painted it from recollection, and it resembles you exactly: I wished it to have borne a more cheerful aspect, but my fancy obstinately persisted in portraying you with the melancholy air of hopeless love: I believe it was this melancholy air that first stole upon my affections.

‘ I will not tell you how often I gaze upon my treasure, nor how often I talk to it in the language of romantic folly. It is too sacred to be exposed to the eye of common observation, therefore I wear it close to my heart. I scarcely know how to bid you adieu; yet I fear I must hastily dispatch this letter. Adieu then!—“ Think of me—dream of me—delight in me—be wholly with me; in short, be my very soul, as I am your’s.”

‘ LAURA.’

CHAP. XXXVI.

' Già riede primavera
 Cor suo fiorito aspetto :
 Già il grato zeffiretto
 Schezza fra l'erbe ed i fior.
 Tornan le pondi agli alberi :
 L'erbette al prato tornano ;
 Sol non ritorna a me
 La pace del mio cor.

NO events of any importance occurred at the cottage for two or three months. Colonel Somerville made frequent visits there, and continued to pay unremitting attention to Miss Mapleton.

Several West India ships arrived, but, alas ! no letter from Edward.

Laura felt both grieved and alarmed, but she never once mentioned the circumstance to her father or Colonel Somerville; disliking even to hint the smallest suspicion of her lover's neglect; and she well knew that illness did not occasion his unaccountable silence; for Colonel Somerville told her, that though his brother had not written to him, he had lately drawn for large sums on his banker. A sensation resembling wounded pride prevented for a long time Laura from writing to him again; but at last, quite wearied out by fruitless conjecture, and agonized by doubt and sorrow, she sent him the following hasty and almost incoherent lines:

‘In the name of common humanity,
tell me, Oh! tell me, Edward, why you so

cruelly neglect me? Every morning I expect to receive a letter from you, and every night I weep with disappointment and grief. At one moment I think you the most cruel, the most deceitful of human beings: at another, I severely upbraid myself for daring to suspect your truth. Write to me—write to me immediately!—let me hear that your letters have been lost, and that absence has not diminished your love. Ah! how long it will be ere you can receive these scarcely intelligible lines! How long a time am I still doomed to feel a thousand shapeless fears, and all the tortures of suspense.

‘Edward, can it be possible!—Have you seen any one who has been too fascinating—have you even in imagina-

tion proved unfaithful?—Your beautiful cousin Oh! I cannot proceed!—Pity my weakness!—

‘ Edward, at least I deserve your friendship!—then fear not to confide in me. If your heart has wandered even for a moment, tell me so. Do not, from a mistaken principle of honour, delude me into misery. If, when you awake in the morning, I have not your first thought; if at night you lie down on your pillow, and do not rejoice that another tedious day is passed; if I no longer appear before you in your solitary walks, and in your dreams,—tell me so!—I had rather know that you were lost to me for ever, than that you should return, and look at me with calm indifference.

‘Oh! Edward, my very soul seems to melt within me at the bare mention of such an idea!—No!—it cannot be!—

‘Surely some strange mistake has prevented the safe arrival of your letters:—and yet, for a long time I received them very punctually!—I am bewildered,—miserable!—But Oh! while I exist, I can never cease to love you my first, my only friend!—

‘LAURA.’

After a sufficient length of time had elapsed for Miss Mapleton to have received an answer to her letter, as none arrived, she could no longer conceal her anxiety from her father. He had long witnessed her internal struggles, without appearing to notice them; but he now began seriously to participate her alarm: for the first faint indica-

tions of Spring had already appeared, and still no tidings arrived from Edward. The mind of Laura was continually vibrating between hope and despair; and her pale melancholy countenance betrayed that the conflict had proved very injurious to her health.

She had anticipated the approach of Spring with exquisite delight; but Edward did not return, nor did he write. Every day her inquietude augmented, and she dreaded that her worst apprehensions would be realized. She often wandered alone through the leafless woods, but always turned away suddenly from those spots that reminded her of Edward.

There is something peculiarly delightful in the sight of early spring flow-

ers; but Laura no longer hailed them as the harbingers of brighter days; and when she first perceived some snow-drops, that peeped forth on a grass-plot beneath the cottage window, she almost viewed them with regret; and plucking one, she sighed, and apostrophized it in these beautiful lines, from Mrs. Robinson's Walsingham—

‘ I too have known the cheerless hour,

* * * * *

And wept, and shrunk like thee !’

—‘ Alas! Heaven only can tell what future storms my poor heart may be destined to encounter !’

While Sir Robert and his daughter continued in this state of anxiety and trembling suspense, Colonel Somerville's opinion was frequently consulted, and the enquiring eye of Laura some-

times endeavoured to catch a ray of comfort from his countenance; but he usually avoided the subject, though he was continually insinuating the Lethean powers of absence, the instability of youthful affections, and, by 'many a dubious giving out,' appeared to know more than he chose to communicate.

Laura wished to learn the extent of her calamity; but she forebore to enquire further from one, who, instead of sympathizing with her, might secretly rejoice at her misfortune.

As the Spring advanced, and no intelligence was received of Edward, she began to lose all expectation of seeing him, and scarcely doubted but that some fortunate rival had supplanted

her in his affections:—however, a faint gleam of hope sometimes darted across her mind, to preserve her from despair. —She occupied herself by recalling Edward's looks, his promises, and every internal evidence of his former affection, till her mind seemed to revolt at the idea of suspecting his fidelity. Her nightly visions took their colour from her waking thoughts; and she sometimes imagined that she beheld Edward like herself, melancholy and desolate, but still faithful, and indulging the anticipation of happier days. These delusions of fancy were her only comfort, and wishing to perpetuate their remembrance, she sometimes endeavoured to shape them into hasty, unstudied verses, of which the following are a specimen:

'Twas sweet as violet-breathing gale,
 'Twas soothing as the moon's faint beam,
 'Twas tender as the ring-dove's tale—
 —Alas! and was it but a Dream?

Methought I saw him once again,
 Again I listen'd to his voice;
 It calm'd the tumults of my brain,
 It made my throbbing heart rejoice.

O! with what eager keen delight
 I trac'd a form distinct and clear,
 That cheated my enraptur'd sight,
 With the blest thought that he was near!

Love still was weeping in his eyes,
 As first the little traitor stole,
 Conceal'd in Pity's soft disguise,
 To pierce and agonize my soul.

Upon his cheek the lingering tear
 Told me, in absence he was true;
 And that pale cheek was far more dear
 Than had it glow'd with Joy's bright hue.

His glist'ning eyes, long fix'd on me,
 A thousand tender hopes impart;
 For such the looks 'twas Heav'n to see,
 When first he sought and won my heart!

Methought they bade my sorrows cease,
 And charm'd despondence from my breast;
 Methought they promis'd joy and peace,
 And for a moment I was blest!

But ah! too soon I wake and weep!
Too soon the hated morning beam
Dispels the phantasies of sleep!—
—Alas! and was it but a Dream?

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CHAP. XXXVII.

‘ No pause the dire extreme between,
He made me blest,—and broke my heart.’

COLONEL Somerville did not appear at the cottage for several days, and Laura was rejoiced to hear that he was gone on a pleasurable excursion to Brighthelmstone; for all society aggravates the pain of a wounded heart, and even the common offices of civility become burdensome: besides, she sometimes fancied that she could trace a secret exultation in his countenance, disguised under the semblance of sym-

pathy and tender friendship. With this observation her instinctive aversion began to revive.

Sir Robert grew peevish and sullen, as his hopes diminished; and Laura was every way unhappy: yet she was soon doomed to know increase of misery, and indeed there is scarcely any situation of life in which the innocent ought to exclaim, 'I am *now* the *most* unfortunate of human beings!'—Some grief, still heavier than the last, may be yet in store; and the wicked only are condemned to endure supremacy of wretchedness.

Sir Robert had for some time complained of a defect in his sight; and it was Laura's frequent task to read to him aloud. One morning, soon after

breakfast, she took up a weekly paper, to communicate to him the most interesting news; but while he was listening with impatience for the confirmation of some favourable reports, suddenly the paper dropt from Laura's hand;—for a moment she gazed wildly around—then fell lifeless to the ground. Sir Robert, in dreadful consternation, endeavoured to raise her; but his efforts proving ineffectual, he violently rang the bell, knelt down beside her, supported her drooping head on his bosom, untied the blue silk net that confined her beautiful auburn hair, and began to rub her temples with some lavender water that happened to be on the table; then gently unloosed her robe, and for the first time discovered the picture of Edward that rested on

her delicate white neck, suspended by a black ribbon. Susan soon entered the room, but stopped at the door, petrified with grief and alarm at the scene before her.

‘Why do you stand there?’ said Sir Robert, in a distracted tone—‘Run!—fly!—bring some drops!—Where is the hartshorn?—Oh God! my poor child!’

Susan went, and returned with the rapidity of lightning, and for some time exerted every effort to revive her beloved mistress, but without success:—at length, when the impatience of Sir Robert had increased almost to phrenzy, a faint sigh from Laura dissipated his torturing suspense.

By degrees her affrighted spirit began to resume its functions, and another sigh, more deep and heavy than the last, again betokened returning animation. She opened her eyes; but alas! those once intelligent eyes bore no expression of consciousness; they glared wildly around, and seemed to gaze on air. Sir Robert was terrified: Susan supported her to the open casement, and intreated her to speak; then placed her on a seat, and ran to fetch some water; but when she requested her to drink it, Laura took it in her hand without appearing to know anything of what was passing. Sir Robert then went up to her, took her hand, wept, conjured her to utter just one word: but still she continued to gaze vacantly around in silence. He then paced up and down the room in

violent agitation, unable to comprehend what terrible stroke had thus overwhelmed her faculties. He then returned to the window, and looked on her intently, to watch the first dawning of reason.

Susan continued talking to her, and in many different ways fruitlessly endeavoured to excite her attention. At length it occurred to her, that her mistress, when she thought herself unobserved, gazed with great delight on the picture that she constantly wore; therefore, gently withdrawing it from her bosom, she held it before her eyes. Laura gazed at it, and instantly her reason returned, and her features became animated by horror and despair: she shrieked wildly, and endeavoured to tear the portrait from

her neck, but the ribbon would not yield to her exertions. She then placed her hand to her head, as if to repress its tumultuous throbbings. Her thoughts began to assume a more tender hue: she again fixed her eyes on the portrait, till her tears fell on it, and bedimmed the chrystal; she then sighed deeply, and replaced it on her bosom.

Sir Robert now thought it a favourable moment to speak to her, and sooth her; but she shook her head, slowly and mournfully; then pointed to the newspaper that was lying on the carpet, as if to say, ‘ read that, and never more speak to me of comfort!’

During the lately alarming scene Sir Robert had never once reflected on

the probable cause of Laura's violent indisposition; but it no longer remained a matter of doubt, when he took up the paper, and read as follows:

'Lately was married at Barbadoes, Captain Edward Somerville to Miss Caroline Ellis.'

'Gracious God! what a rascal!' exclaimed Sir Robert, in furious anger: 'but I will pursue him to the extremity of the earth, and stab him to the heart.'

Laura did not hear this impotent threat, for she had again relapsed into insensibility. Susan and her father carried her up stairs. The next day a violent fever confined her to her bed:

a physician was sent for, who pronounced her in imminent danger, and for ten days she lingered between life and death.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

‘O! that I could as smoke arise,
 That lifts its black wreaths thro’ the air;
 Mix with the clouds, that o’er the skies
 Show their light forms, and disappear:
 Or, like the dust, be toss’d
 By ev’ry sportive wind, till all be lost!’

AS Miss Mapleton had for some time dreaded the loss of Edward’s affections, it may be thought extraordinary that she was not better prepared to sustain the confirmation of that misfortune: but her previous alarm and anxiety had to such a degree weakened her health, that the fatal certainty of her lover’s desertion seemed to annihilate all her faculties: her brain could not support the tu-

mults of her heart; the fever of mental agony thrilled through every nerve, and she would have fallen an unresisting victim to despair, had it not been for the great professional skill and humane attention of the physician who attended her. To please her father, she passively submitted to every remedy that was prescribed; but secretly flattered herself that they would prove ineffectual, for she wished to die. She felt that, as she could never again look at Edward with esteem and love, it would be far better to close her eyes on a world that contained no other object worthy to excite a wish.

Such were the reflections of a mind palsied by grief: but it is wrong to indulge such hopeless despondence; for, though the world may have lost

every charm, we ought not to quit it in disgust; but consent to live, that our virtues may pass through the ordeal of affliction, and our earthly sorrows become a passport to that heavenly abode 'where all tears shall be wiped from all eyes.'

Laura now began to recover by slow degrees; but she only recovered to a more acute sensation of misery. 'Ah!' thought she, 'why did I not expire at the fatal moment when my eyes were fixed on the testimony of Edward's perfidy!—He was the sustaining power of my soul!—Every thought, every wish, every joy, began and ended in him. I caught from his eyes the first look of love that taught me what it was to exist. He just permitted me to smile a few moments on the phan-

tem of happiness :—I have known what it is to love, and I have not lived in vain!—But Oh ! my Edward is now lost to me for ever !—why do I still retain this detestable breath of life ?

Such were Laura's mental exclamations in some of her calmest moments; but as her strength returned, her mind became yet more fully impressed with the consciousness of incurable misery; and she could not think on Edward without experiencing sensations that bordered on distraction : for there is not any pang so severe as that which arises from the necessity of despising one whom we have heretofore esteemed, and still are doomed, against the light of conviction, to adore.' Oh ! it inflicts a sting that is ' sharper than the serpent's tooth.'

Sir Robert beheld his daughter's recovery with exquisite joy; and he had sense enough not farther to agonize her mind by ill timed consolation. He endeavoured to delude her into occupation. He placed her harp by the window; her favourite books were dispersed about the room; but for a long time she did not touch either. One morning, however, she happened to take up the poems of Ossian, that were lying on the table: their wild sublimity was in unison with her feelings; she envied the car-borne *heroes* who fell in the days of their renown: and the white armed virgins who died of grief! 'Alas!' thought she, 'why cannot I likewise pass away in secret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strews its withered leaves on the blast!'

Sometimes, to comply with her father's earnest intreaty, she would accompany him in his walks to catch the reviving breezes of evening, but carefully avoiding the wood and the sea shore. The weather was remarkably fine; but the brightness of the sun was now odious to her; and she would have preferred the gloomy fogs and bitter blasts of December. If during her walks she chanced to hear the song of the peasant, or the loud laugh of cottage children, the sounds thrilled through her heart, and seemed to insult her misery. At such moments she would unconsciously exclaim, 'alas! every other human being is happier than I am? Ah! wherefore am I doomed to such extreme of wretchedness?'

It is frequently observed, that severe grief can never be expressed in words; and certainly it is at first more strongly testified by 'that mute eloquence which passeth speech:' but after its tumults begin to subside, the soul has a kind of gloomy satisfaction in counting over its sorrows. The imagination combines them into a thousand different forms; aches to pour forth its agonizing feelings; and it is not unnatural at such a time to disburthen them in the language of the Muses: for keen sensibility is a sort of inspiration.

Laura sometimes found a degree of consolation in endeavouring to portray the anguish of her heart, in verses suggested by the impulse of the moment; and the following sonnet is

the least imperfect of these melancholy compositions.

‘ That it should come to this !’—that I, so gay
 Ere Love beguil’d me, now should sit and weep,
 As tho’ my heart would break ; and hate the day,
 And wish for night, that I a while might steep
 My aching senses in the balm of sleep:
 Yet when the darkness shrouds me, oft I say,
 ‘ How long these mournful vigils must I keep?
 Why lingers thus the sun’s revolving ray?’
 Or if I chance to close my tear-swoln eyes,
 And dream of peace and happiness again ;
 Or should a visionary form arise,
 Source of my fleeting bliss and endless pain ;
 Ah! when I wake, how bitter are my sighs !
 What madd’ning fancies dart across my brain !

CHAP. XXXIX.

' Away! nor murmur at th' afflictive rod;
Nor tempt the vengeance of an angry God.'
Flys't thou from Providence for vain relief,
Such ill sought ease shall draw avenging grief.

THE mental sufferings of poor Laura became daily more and more acute; her reason began to totter, and a settled melancholy took possession of her soul:—that terrible species of melancholy which, engrossed by one agonizing idea, wilfully excludes every other; dwells with gloomy delight on recollections that nourish despair; permits sensation to triumph over reason;

and presumptuously dares to cast a 'longing lingering look' on the ghastly form of a suicide.

Laura now frequently took solitary walks at a considerable distance from the cottage; for she felt that when her frame was almost exhausted by fatigue, the agitation of her mind was less violent.

One fine evening, at a moment that she felt herself peculiarly wretched, she determined to wander through the wood, to enjoy, without interruption, her gloomy meditations. She soon reached the little rivulet that she had so much loved in happier days. 'Ah!' thought she, 'it was here that I received the first letter that Edward ever wrote me; it was here' —

She could not endure the recollections that crowded on her mind; and averting her eyes from the spot, she hastily turned into another path. Unfortunately she took a path which conducted her beneath the oak where she had reclined, half fainting, on the bosom of her lover.

‘Alas!’ exclaimed she, wildly, ‘why did I not expire here at the moment he told me that he was mine for ever!—And then he looked at me!—Oh! that I had closed my eyes for ever, while that look was thrilling through my heart!’

She then walked hastily along into the meadow, where she had once met Edward’s servant; and stood some minutes gazing wistfully on the deep

rapid stream that meandered through it; then inwardly shuddering, returned into the wood, and opened a gate that led out on the heath: there the remembrance of former times still haunted her, and she could not avoid exclaiming, as she looked on the hill before her, ‘ Is it possible that I could be unhappy, is it possible I could repine in those days when I knew that he was near me; when I could gaze on the towers of the city where he dwelt, and was certain that he loved me?’

Engrossed by torturing reflections, Laura wandered a long time unconscious whither she was going; at length, on lifting up her eyes, she discovered that she was close to the pales of Woodleigh Park. Feeling a sudden inclination to revisit scenes

once so dear, and knowing that Colonel Somerville was from home, she entered a little gate that opened into the shrubbery. She had strayed thus far, unmindful that night was fast approaching, and she was surprised to observe the reflection of the moon on the water, and the long shadows of some ancient elms.

Still she could not prevail on herself to return till she had once more beheld the arbour where she had first heard that she was beloved. However, when she came to the low door-way, she stood there a few moments, irresolute whether or not to enter; then, as if by an effort of courage, she ran in, and threw herself on the bench. For some moments she gazed mournfully around. All nature seemed to repose.

The moon beams illumined the distant perspective; the ocean beat monotonously against the shore; the deer calmly brouzed on the dewy herbage; and not a zephyr seemed to agitate the leaves of the memorable chesnut-tree, or the blossoms of the odoriferous shrubs that grew at the entrance of the harbour. The calmness and tranquillity of the surrounding scenery was hateful to Laura, contrasted with the tumultuous agonies that shook her senses. She thought on the many hours that she had passed in the harbour with Edward when welcome love first stole upon her heart. The lattice work, the matted pavement, the rustic table, every object remained unaltered, and seemed so many silent witnesses of her lover's perfidy. Even the odour of the woodbine and wild roses re-

mind her of those blissful moments when their same odour had vibrated on her senses together with the voice of Edward. She placed her hands over her eyes; she leaned down her head on the table; but could not weep. Suddenly starting up, and no longer able to restrain her violent emotions, she exclaimed, in a frantic tone, 'Oh gracious God! is it possible that he can be married to another! and am I then so *very* lost a wretch!—It was here, in this arbour, that he first told me he loved me!—and now' —

' Oh! Edward, Edward! even at this moment I adore you; at this moment, when, perhaps, you are talking to her in those low tender accents that captivated my soul—when, perhaps, you are gazing on her enraptured, un-

mindful of what your poor Laura must suffer!—And is she then so ineffably charming? Does she know herself the motive of his every thought and action?—Does she listen with joyful credulity to his delusive promises?—O! that I could see him once more, to upbraid him, and expire at his feet!

‘Whither will these horrible thoughts lead me?—My brain burns; dark indistinct images seem to float before my sight:—I must die!—Nature can no longer endure such excruciating torture!’

Saying these words, she rose hastily from the bench, and clasped her hands together in agony; then suddenly unclosed them; and they fell down, as if lifeless, by her side.

The exertion loosened Edward's ring from her finger:—it dropt on the ground. Laura looked at it; and unfortunately her attention was arrested by something that glittered in the moon-beams. It was a large knife with which the gardener had been pruning the arbour. In a moment of frenzy Laura darted on it—held it in her hand—looked at it—then uttered a loud laugh, and plunged it into her bosom. The blood streamed copiously from the wound—she tottered—fell on the bench—and fainted.

CHAP. XL.

‘ Cet amour dont l'idée avait fait mon bonheur,
Ce jour tant souhaité n'est qu'un jour de terreur.’

IT is uncertain how long she remained in this state. On recovering her senses, she felt herself supported in the arms of some one; but she had not strength to open her eyes, or to evince any other token of existence.

‘ Wretch that I am!—O! Laura!
my beloved Laura!’ exclaimed a voice,
in the piercing accents of despair.

Laura shuddered, and gently placed her hand on her wounded bosom.

‘Great God, she lives!’ continued the same voice, in a tone *how* different from the former exclamation !

At these words Laura ventured to look up, and found herself supported in the arms of EDWARD ! A faint shriek testified her recollection ;—she endeavoured to disengage herself from him, and again closed her eyes.

‘Am I then so odious, that you cannot endure even to look on me?’ cried Edward. ‘O! gracious Heaven! is it *thus* we meet?—Speak to me, speak to me!—You are bleeding!—you are dying!—Who has committed this infernal deed? Quick, name the barbarous assassin?’

‘Edward Somerville!—exclaimed Laura, in a tone that made him start,

and shrink with horror: then relapsing into delirium, she continued, ' I have had a fearful dream!—I thought that I had committed murder—*self-murder*,' whispered she.

' Nay, do not look frightened—it was nothing but a dream!'

' I have been troubled with bad dreams of late. One night I fancied that you were gone a great way off; and then that you forgot poor Laura, and married your beautiful cousin.—But it was foolish to think so!—It could be nothing but a dream—for when I awoke in the morning, I found my wedding-ring upon my finger.'

Quite exhausted by the exertion of speaking, Laura again fell lifeless into

Edward's arms. The moon that shone full on her beautiful countenance seemed to increase its death-like paleness; and her long hair, hanging in disorder over her shoulders, half obscured her wounded bosom, and the portrait that was still suspended there.

Edward was almost as much deprived of sense as the unfortunate Laura; but fearing that she might be already dead, or expiring for want of proper assistance, he with a sort of desperate strength, lifted her up in his arms, and ran till he reached the house. The hall was filled with domestics; Edward did not appear to notice them, but pressed eagerly forward, till he reached a breakfast parlour, and placed the lifeless Laura on a sofa. Before he had time to call for assistance, the house-

keeper and two or three other servants ran into the room, with countenances expressive of the greatest consternation. They all surrounded Edward, but scarcely appeared to notice the mournful object that was extended before them.

‘O! Sir!’ exclaimed they all together, ‘you are come back, Sir, just in time!—Master is dying: I suppose you know that the Doctor gives no hopes on him.’

‘What do I hear?’ exclaimed Edward—‘my brother dying!—Where?—how?—Let me fly to him this instant!’

‘No, Sir!’ replied the house keeper—‘I must make bold, Sir, to request

that you won't go for to disturb him. Why, the Doctor told us to be as quiet as mice, and won't let none of us go anighst him, because he has got a what d'ye call it on his brain; and sure enough, Jack the groom brought him in here, an hour ago, as dead as a door nail.'

'What! he has fallen from his horse?' hastily exclaimed Edward, disgusted with the unconcern with which Colonel Somerville's servants mentioned his accident: then turning to the sofa, in an agony of grief, he desired some women who were gazing on Laura, with wonder and pity, to endeavour to convey her up stairs; while he ran in pursuit of the surgeon. Edward soon found him in the court-yard, ready to depart. It happened to be the same humane gentleman who had attended

him during his severe fever at Woodleigh. He was much astonished at seeing Edward, and advancing to meet him, exclaimed—‘ Can I trust the evidence of my senses ?—Is it really Captain Somerville ?—Welcome to England, Sir !—But we meet at an unfortunate moment. I am sorry to say that I have very little hope of your brother’s recovery. Have his wounds opened afresh, for I perceive that your coat is stained with blood ?’

‘ Follow me—follow me, instantly !’ cried Edward, seizing his hand.

‘ Is he then worse ?’ enquired Mr. Langley.

‘ Laura is dying !—Laura is wounded ! O God ! perhaps we are even now too late !’ vociferated Edward.

——' Wounded?—Miss Mapleton in danger?—where is she, Sir? I would give my life to save her!—she is a perfect angel!'

Saying these words, he proceeded with hasty strides towards the house. Edward ran before him, and they soon reached the hall. At the head of the staircase, a female servant beckoned them to be silent, and pointed to the room where Laura had been deposited. Edward followed Mr. Langley to the door, but would not enter, for he felt a terrible prepossession that she was dead.

After he had listened a few minutes in motionless agony, Mr. Langley came out of the room, and told him that Miss Mapleton still breathed.

‘ God Almighty bless you for ever !’
cried Edward, in a transport of joy.

‘ Nay, be not too sanguine in your hopes,’ resumed Mr Langley:—‘ and, above all things, do not attempt to enter her apartment, for the least shock at such a moment as this must inevitably prove fatal.’

CHAP. XLI.

* Doglienze inutili—disperazione inputtuosa - - - -
Angoscie opprimetemi! —

EDWARD in a joyful tone promised implicit obedience, and began to walk up and down the long gallery; but frequently paused, to listen if any sound proceeded from Laura's chamber.—All was perfectly quiet, and he leant in a musing posture against the iron railing of the gallery. The moon shone brightly through the large Gothic windows of the hall; and the black and white tessellated pavement, and old fa-

mily pictures frowning in armour from their ponderous gilt frames, forcibly reminded him of past happiness. His mind was now bewildered by a perfect chaos of thought. The image of Laura, wounded, bleeding, fainting in his arms, thrilled him with horror—and then the incoherent words she had uttered, so dreadfully mysterious! Could he dare to imagine that his virtuous Laura had committed suicide?—and what could have driven her to such a deed of desperation?—Was she married to his brother?—and did she repent?

A degree of probability attached itself to this suspicion; and he was determined to go in search of some one who might confirm or dissipate it entirely: he was likewise desirous of seeing his brother (though assured he was lying

in a state of torpor)—Therefore he walked to the farther end of the gallery, to the room that Colonel Somerville had been accustomed to occupy, and softly entering, just as the stable clock was striking twelve, he glided to the foot of the bed, and gently undrew the curtains. Colonel Somerville's valet, who was sitting at the side, looked up, uttered a shriek of horror, and fell almost senseless on the bed. Indeed a more courageous heart might have felt appalled at Edward's appearance. The moon-beams fully disclosed his pale emaciated countenance; his hair hung in wild disorder, and his light travelling dress was spotted with blood.

Engrossed by his own ruminations, and the sight of his unfortunate brother, he scarcely noticed the alarm of

the servant, till suddenly he heard him tremulously exclaim, ‘ in the name of Lord Jesus, vanish !’

Edward, finding himself mistaken for a spectre, could not forbear smiling.

‘ Lord have mercy upon me !’ cried the man, in a voice scarcely articulate; ‘ I suppose you are come all over the seas to drag my master down into his grave: but I am only a poor servant— Oh ! pray don’t glare your eyes at me ! —I’ll confess all !—I’ll tell Miss Laura all about it—and indeed, indeed it went to my soul to do her a harm !’

‘ Speak, villain !—explain instantly what you mean !’—exclaimed Edward, in a voice much too loud for a spectre.

At this moment Mr. Langley approached the bed, and told Edward that he begged he would accompany him immediately into Miss Mapleton's apartment. The mysterious words that had been uttered by Colonel Somerville's servant were instantly forgotten, and Edward hastily exclaimed — 'Is she better?—Does she ask to see me?'—then rushed out of the chamber, without waiting for an answer.

Mr. Langley followed him, and gave him the melancholy information that Laura was still in imminent danger, but that her senses were returned, and that she expressed the most earnest desire to see him,—perfectly recollecting that he had spoken to her in the arbour.

Edward was by this time at the door of her apartment: he listened—all was quiet: he then softly entered—knelt down by the side of her bed—and convulsively grasped her clay-cold hand.

Laura faintly raised her head, and mournfully exclaimed—‘ I have not deserved this happiness!—Edward, I have not deserved to fix my dying eyes on your’s!—I am a poor sinful wretch!—But why are you thus agitated?—I mean not to upbraid you!—And yet it was cruel to abandon me!—It surely was a crime to drive me to despair!’

After a short pause, she continued, lifting her languid eyes to Heaven, ‘ O Omnipotent Judge of the Universe!—Thou in whose presence I must shortly appear!—I dare not implore thee to

have mercy on sin so black as mine;—
 but Oh ! I tremblingly beseech thee to
 pardon the poor deluded being whose
 perfidy has involved me in guilt and
 eternal destruction !’

At these words Captain Somerville
 looked up aghast. Laura fixed her
 eyes on him, then slowly continued,
 ‘ Edward, it has long been my only
 wish to die ! and even now I feel a
 strange sensation of delight, in thinking
 that I shall breathe out my last sigh
 while you are near me !——But Oh ! I
 am agonized by acute pain, and more
 sharply tortured by remorse !——Whi-
 ther am I going ?——Shall we never meet
 again in happier regions ?——No !——
 for I have committed murder !’——
 inwardly exclaimed she, in the hollow,

tone of despair; then with a deep groan fell almost exhausted on her pillow.

Edward could not weep, but gazed on her with a look of unutterable tenderness, till she placed her hand before her eyes, and softly exclaimed—‘O! look not on me thus, Edward! or I shall begin to think this hour of guilt and death the happiest I have ever known!—*Pity* is all that you can now bestow on me!—Why then do you suffer the delusive semblance of love to gleam through tears?—Have you not broken my heart?—Have you not maddened my brain?—and can you still wish to deceive me by feigned tokens of tenderness, when I know that you are devoted to another—when I know that you are—MARRIED?

‘Gracious God!’ exclaimed Edward, ‘what do I hear?—Laura, my adored Laura, tell me what you mean? Some strange mystery hangs over your words. How could you think it possible? Have I deserved such suspicions?—I have endured captivity, poverty, disease—I believed you cruel, faithless, lost to me for ever!—I have sustained every species of anguish—but, thank God, I am not a villain!—I am *not* married!’——

‘Not *married*!’——cried Laura, sinking lifeless on her pillow.

‘Not married!’——repeated Mr. Langley, in great astonishment.

A pause of some moments followed this interesting discovery, until Mr.

Langley violently rang the bell, as his patient needed further assistance. Most of the servants were gone to sleep; but Captain Somerville's faithful Harry, happening to be passing through the gallery, entered at that time the apartment.

On approaching the bed he burst into tears, and, wringing his hands, exclaimed, ' Yes, it's true enough she's dead! —quite dead! —poor, dear, sweet, beautiful Miss Laura! —how master did love her! —alas! alas! I wish we had never got out of the French prison, to come home to see such a piteous sight as this! —I'm sure 'twould melt a heart of stone!

' Lord, Sir!' continued he, turning to Edward, ' I have heard such strange

things! The women folks here be all ready to tear you to pieces; they say that you be a false perjury lovyer; and that Miss Laura has done herself a mischief all along of you being married to some neger wench. However, I soon stopped their clatter, for I said to 'em, says I, ' Ladies, don't put yourselves in a passion, for it's nothing more nor less than a damned lie. Master and I went to get a mint of -money, as you might remember, in the West Ingees; but we wasn't long upon the seas before we were taken by a privateer, and soon shopped up in a fine French palace; where we didn't see a petticoat for eight months. At last, when we nicked 'em, and got safe off to the West Ingees, master caught the yellow fever; and I'm sure we thought more of a burying than a wedding.'

During this harangue, Mr. Langley had been endeavouring to revive Laura, and two or three female servants had entered the room, but he had not lost a syllable of what had been said; and when Harry had ceased speaking, he stepped forward, and exclaimed,

• I perceive, Captain Somerville, that some strange mistake has arisen; for I assure you it was confidently stated in several newspapers that you were married to a Miss Caroline Ellis. About that time I was called in, with a skilful physician of the neighbourhood, to attend Miss Mapleton. Her disorder was a phrenzy fever, and we soon discovered that it was occasioned by your apparently ungenerous and cruel conduct. Unremitting care and solicitude pre-

served her life; but her health has never been perfectly re-established; a settled melancholy ensued; and no doubt it was a species of insanity that prompted the terrible deed from which I still dread the most fatal consequences: therefore, I hope, Sir, that you will pardon my requesting you to leave this apartment, for should Miss Mapleton behold you, on recovering from her fainting fit, I should tremble for the consequence.'

Edward silently obeyed, and walked down the stone stair-case into the hall: he there paced up and down some minutes, with a heart oppressed almost to bursting; gazed unconsciously from the window on the tints of morning that began to streak the horizon—

then threw himself into a chair; and his frame was so much exhausted by the agitation of his mind that he fell asleep.

CHAP. XXXIX.

‘ La peine suit le crime. ’——

WHEN he awoke at about seven o'clock in the morning, he rubbed his eyes, and flattered himself that the events of the preceding day had been all a dream:—but the approach of Mr. Langley, who was walking in deep conversation with another gentleman, too soon convinced him of their reality. Edward joined them, and anxiously enquired for Laura.

‘It is not possible to give any decisive answer concerning her,’ replied Mr. Langley; ‘she is at present in a doze, and probably a few hours will produce a crisis. Colonel Somerville is surprisingly recovered; and my worthy friend, who has likewise examined the wound in his head, is of opinion that it exhibits a very favourable appearance.’

At this intelligence Edward ran up stairs, entered his brother’s apartment, and was surprised to hear the sick man swearing violently at his servant.

‘O! here comes the spectre!’ exclaimed Colonel Somerville, as Edward approached the bed. ‘So, Sir, I suppose you are not vastly rejoiced to

see me thus recovered, and perfectly *compos mentis* once more!—My death, or a statute of lunacy against me, might have been a pleasanter thing.'

'I'm determined I'll tell Captain Somerville all about it!—I won't be used like a dog for nothing!'—muttered the Colonel's servant.

'Hold your tongue! you cowardly chicken-hearted scoundrel!'—vociferated his master, in a rage.

'You never gave me any thing to keep your secret!' retorted the other.

Colonel Somerville endeavoured to seize him by the collar; but having received violent bruises, besides the

contusion on his brain, he could not rise from his bed.

‘ Well, Sir!’ cried the servant, exultingly, addressing himself to Edward—‘ You must know that my master, finding that he could not prevail on Miss Mapleton to marry him whilst you was in England, forged a letter, as if it came from your friends in the West Indies; thinking that if you went there, you would perhaps die of the yellow fever; or at least be gone long enough for him to prosecute his designs upon Miss Mapleton. Well, you went away—you were taken by a French privateer—but the news didn’t reach the cottage, and I bribed the man at the post-office to let me see all the letters directed to Miss Mapleton;—and all those you contrived to write from

the prison, I took away, and exchanged for others, that my master worded, and I copied; because I knew how to imitate your hand. Those letters that you sent when you escaped, and landed in the West Indies,—those that mentioned your illness, &c. were all burnt; and Miss Laura almost broke her heart at your supposed neglect. Our plot now began to thicken,—a paragraph, containing the pretended intelligence of your marriage, was inserted by me in several newspapers; and probably Miss Mapleton might have married my master out of spite, if she had not thought that it would be more agreeable to kill herself.'

After this disclosure, he bowed, and with impertinent sang froid quitted the apartment.

Colonel Somerville's countenance was almost convulsed with rage; and after a short pause, turning towards his brother, he exclaimed, with a malignant smile, 'At least it is some consolation to know that Laura lies at the point of death, and that you are as wretched as myself!—I adored her, and did not chuse that my passion should be opposed by a younger brother. I detested you for having won her affections; at moments I detested you both; and even now I would rather see her writhing before me in the agonies of death, than that she should live to become your wife!'

'How can you confess yourself such a wretch!' cried Edward, shuddering.

——'This wound in my head pains me confoundedly!' continued Colonel

Somerville, without heeding his brother's exclamation. ' I had better make my will; and if Laura lives I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that you will both be beggars: besides, it will be necessary to make some provision for Louisa Dornford. To be sure the seduction was on her side: she fell a victim to inordinate vanity; and I hated her mind whilst I admired her person:—however, since she is deserted by her family, it will not be like a man of honour to leave her with no other resource but prostitution.'

' A man of honour!'—cried Edward, indignantly—' Prophanè not the name!'

At this moment Mr. Langley and the other surgeon entered the room,

and seemed alarmed on observing the wild appearance and inflamed countenance of their patient. On feeling his pulse, they cast a significant look at each other.

‘Nay! no winking, gentlemen,’ cried Colonel Somerville, angrily; ‘I am acquainted with the tricks of your trade: you wish to terrify me, and to enhance the merit of your cure.’

‘Something very extraordinary has happened,’ replied Mr. Langley, calmly: ‘a great revolution has taken place. I fear you have not been kept sufficiently quiet.’

‘To be sure I have been in a devilish passion with my rascal of a servant:—but I hope you do not think I am in

any danger?' exclaimed the Colonel, with a terrified countenance.

Mr. Langley shook his head, and Colonel Somerville turning to the other surgeon, desired to hear his opinion.

The surgeon hesitated for a few moments, then told him, that if he had any worldly affairs to settle he had better begin about it immediately.

'Damnation!—am I dying?'—groaned the sick man, with a convulsive shivering; while drops of blood trickled down his forehead, and his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets.

Edward could not endure such a spectacle, but quitted the apartment, and feeling faint and unwell, he thought that the air might revive him, and

walked into the park. When he returned to the house, Mr. Langley met him in the hall, and after a short preface, informed him that his brother had just expired.

‘ I do not affect to condole with you,’ continued Mr. Langley, ‘ for I think that his infamous conduct towards you (which he has just confessed) must have broken all the bonds of fraternal affection. I rejoice that you did not witness the manner of his death. At one moment he talked incoherently of his unrepented crimes: then raved at the thought that you would possess his fortune: then called on Miss Mapleton, and conjured us, with tears in his eyes, to save his life. Indeed, in the whole course of my practice, I never saw any one expire under such exquisite tortures of mind and body.’

‘ You forget that he was my brother !
—I could have spared these details !’
cried Edward, mournfully. After a
long pause, Mr. Langley changed the
current of his thoughts, by telling
him that Miss Mapleton was awakened
from her doze; and that he had by de-
grees explained to her the plans and
treachery of Colonel Somerville. ‘ She
is still in the greatest danger,’ conti-
nued Mr. Langley, ‘ but she is very
anxious to see you; therefore, if you
please, you may accompany me into
her apartment.’

CHAP. XLIII.

‘ The ways of Heaven are dark ;—
Respect its judgments,—*pray* and *suffer*. ’

‘ IS it my Edward ? ’ faintly exclaimed Laura, as she heard some one approach her bed.

She was sitting up, supported by pillows; and her countenance, though pale, was still exquisitely beautiful. Edward softly undrew her curtain, and she gazed at him a few moments in silence, with the most touching expression of tenderness and stifled grief. She held out her hand to him,

but was still unable to speak. At length she said, in tremulous plaintive accents,

‘ Edward, you still love me!—I was deceived!—basely, cruelly deceived!—you love me!—Do not grieve for me!—I shall now die in peace!’

Alas! the tear that glistened on her cheek belied her words. Edward groaned, and pressed her cold hand to his bosom.

‘ Edward!’ continued she, after a long pause, ‘ I cannot conceal my emotions!—I feel that death is indeed terrible at such a moment as this!—O! God,’ cried she, raising her voice, ‘ to think that he still loves me,—that every obstacle that impeded our union

is now removed,—that he is near me!
 —To hear him—to look at him—to
 feel that I doat on him more than
 ever,—and to know that in a few hours
 I shall be cold—senseless—that my
 eyes will no longer be able to distin-
 guish his form—that my poor fond
 heart will no longer throb at the sound
 of his voice!—Oh! Edward!—Ed-
 ward!—

Susan sobbed audibly: Mr. Langley
 appeared much affected:—but her
 father and lover were too wretched to
 weep. After a pause, Laura continued,
 in a more calm and solemn tone,

‘O! my God! do not utterly aban-
 don me!—Sustain me in this hour of
 trial; and take pity on a sinful shud-

dering soul, that has dared to rush uncalled into thy presence!—I acknowledge that I have merited my doom:—*for I did not bear thy dispensations with patience and resignation.* At the moment when thy mysterious Providence was preparing to turn my sorrows into joy—Ah! even at that moment I believed myself utterly forsaken—I no longer trusted that “thou wouldst deliver me”—I impiously cherished despair—and no pitying angel arrested my arm when I aimed it at my sinful bosom; for I had wilfully resigned the Almighty protection, and spurned from me the consolations of religion.—Oh! that the torturing anguish I now feel could expiate my crime!—but alas! not even the scalding tears of remorse can wash away the stain of murder!’

Overwhelmed by this horrible reflection, Laura sunk almost lifeless on her pillow. Mr. Langley administered some drops: she soon became more composed; and fixing her languid eyes on Edward, faintly exclaimed,

‘ It would have been sweet to have lived for you, my beloved ! and there is a melancholy satisfaction in knowing that I shall never fade from your memory ! Had we married, habit might have produced indifference !—I should have died of grief, and have sunk into my grave unlamented ! ’

‘ Oh ! never, never ! ’ cried Edward, convulsively grasping her hand.

‘ You must comfort my poor father ! ’ said Laura, pointing to the bottom of

the bed, where he stood in speechless grief.

‘ Edward!’ she continued, ‘ what are your opinions concerning futurity? —Do you think we shall recollect each other hereafter?—O my tender friend, you never knew to what excess I loved you; because I never could find words to express all I felt.—Ah! why did I not learn to moderate my sensibility ere it hurried me beyond the bounds of reason and religion, and made me forget my God!—And to *think* what I have lost!—Had it not been for one rash moment - - - - - Alas! my voice fails!—I am dying!—O! Edward!—O! my father!’—

Mr. Langley felt her pulse:—she watched his countenance; then raised

her eyes towards Heaven with fervent devotion, and remained a few minutes in silent prayer. When she had finished, she took up Edward's portrait, that was still hanging round her neck—looked at it—pressed it to her lips—and said, in an expiring voice, 'My beloved, your picture was at my heart. It turned aside the fatal instrument, or I should have died without knowing that you would grieve for me. It has been my only comfort—it seemed to pity me when I wept over it—and I have kissed it a thousand times. Suffer it to remain close to my heart when I am dead.'

Her last words were scarcely articulate. Her pulse stopped—she shivered convulsively—again essayed to speak—sighed—gasped—was sinking on the

pillow—but Edward caught her in his arms. Her beautiful eyes were closed; but as Edward hung over her, his tears fell on her cheek: she felt them: a lambent smile quivered on her lips:—she gently raised herself, opened her eyes, and fixed them for a moment on his countenance—then again fell on his bosom, and closed them for ever!

FINIS.

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